MISTER BILL

"A Man"

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"A MAN"

BY

ALBERT E. LYONS

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Some men are strong—gentle in their strength; quick to forgive—slow to condemn; giving but asking nothing in return—doing because it is for them to do. The world is better that they have lived. To the memory of such a man, whose companionship was, and ever will be, a strength and inspiration, this book is dedicated.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The "Old Man"	9
II	The Man	18
III	The Great Man's Daughter	29
IV	The Master Hand	37
V	"Daddie"	47
VI	Ling's "S'plise"	56
VII	The Test of the Metal	62
VIII	No Flaw	69
IX	Woman's Intuition	77
X	When Men are Tempted	83
XI	Those Who Watch and Wait	95
XII	A Yellow Streak?	100
XIII	The Woman	106
XIV	As Men are Made	112
XV	Do I Intrude?	119
XVI	A Man Who Dared	126
XVII	Love, Indeed!	137
XVIII	A Friend in Need and Deed	147
XIX	Man Must Conquer	157
XX	Woman Must Choose	168
XXI	Man's Regeneration	179
XXII	"Only a Man!"	190
XXIII	Orders	206
XXIV	A "Real and Truly" Story	215

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXV	The Hold-Up Party	228
XXVI	Woman's Diplomacy	242
XXVII	"The Tongue is But a Foolish Jester"	250
XXVIII	Men of Iron Nerve	256
XXIX	"Who the Devil Are You?"	274
XXX	Man to Man	288
XXXI	"*You* Love *Me*?"	298
XXXII	The Law that Rules the Universe	310

MISTER BILL

CHAPTER I

THE "OLD MAN"

"THE Old Man's comin'," laconically remarked Hank Kilburne, sheriff and all around fighting man, as he strode briskly into the Good Luck Saloon and joined the row of rough fellows leaning against the bar. "His car was hitched on to number six at Albuquerque early this evenin'—he'll be here in the mornin'," he added, in reply to the several interrogatories called forth by his remark.

"It's about time he took a look in; but I reckon he don't know jest what he's buttin' into," growled Ed Belden, one of his deputies.

"Things were getting a little too warm for the crowd to handle and they sent out a hurry-up call. The Old Man's keepin' the wires hot—"

"And pullin' a few, you can bet," gruffly interrupted another of the crowd.

"Like enough, and I 'low he has reason to. He's got a mighty big fight on his hands, if I'm any judge of first-class fightin' material," said Hank, with an expressive shake of the head.

"His crowd have been whipped to a standstill, and

they're jest findin' it out. Maybe the Old Man can tell 'em how it happened," Ed sarcastically observed, giving additional emphasis to his remark by an extra tilt of the bottle from which he was filling his glass.

"I reckon the law don't cut much figure in this 'ere fight; the Old Man will win if he 'as to bust the Constitution," declared another of the deputies, as he in turn helped himself to a liberal allowance of "Old Club Foot."

"If he's lookin' for fight he'll find it—there'll be hell to pay 'round here afore long. Well, boys, here goes!" said Hank, setting the example, and each man tossed off his glass of "licker" with one short, quick gulp, and fell to discussing the situation with renewed energy.

The conflict of capital versus labor was on in deadly earnest in the mountain mining district of Arapahoe, New Mexico. The center of the strife revolved about the little town of Gold Dust, which seemed in imminent danger of being wiped out of existence when the storm broke in all its fury. The Gold Coin, Good News, Yellow Metal and Boodle Mines, their smelters and reduction works, owned by the Eastern Syndicate, a corporation chartered under the laws of the State of New Jersey, had declared a lockout in answer to a demand on the part of their men for an eight-hour agreement, and the regulation of certain abuses which they maintained were contrary to law and the well being of the men. As rapidly as possible new men had been brought into the district to take the places of the locked-out workers. From a few deputies to guard the newcomers the force had been rapidly increased, which only tended to make the men more angry and aggressive as they saw their places being taken by the strike-breakers. Clashes between the two

forces were of every-day occurrence, and only cool heads had prevented a general outbreak. Recognizing that the situation had gone beyond control, and was each hour becoming more desperate, the mine owners had made an urgent appeal to the federal powers for assistance to preserve order in the district. Several companies of regulars had been immediately despatched to the scene. Instead of being awed by this display of force the disgruntled miners immediately set about making preparations to meet force with force. This motley army of laborers composed of the underground men, engineers, firemen, smelters, refiners, timbermen, blacksmiths, sharpeners, teamsters and helpers, to the number of two thousand strong, were armed and all more or less experienced in the use of their weapons. On the little knoll overlooking the town a portion of the military force was encamped, while over on the mountain side, to the left of the town in the immediate vicinity of the mines, the remainder of the force had pitched its tents. The soldiers were stern and silent; they were ready for duty when they should be called upon.

Over to the right of the town clouds of smoke belching from the stacks of a mammoth plant contrasted strangely with the desultory puffs which seemed to creep up almost apologetically from the stacks of the unfair mines. Repeated attempts had been made to draw The Consolidated Properties into the strife by the managers of the rival companies, but without success. The owners of these properties had steadfastly refused to take up a fight in which they were not interested, and with which they had no sympathy. Persuasions and threats having failed to accomplish their purpose, a system of intimida-

tion and violence had been put into operation against it. Several attempts had been made to blow up certain portions of the works, and various schemes of retaliation had been frustrated by the vigilance of its owners. Every avenue of approach to the Consolidated works was now guarded by a force of armed men, beyond which none but the most trusted employees were allowed to go. A force of five hundred picked men could be called to the defense of the works at a moment's notice. The disruption of this company was the avowed purpose of the powerful Syndicate as a penalty for refusing to join forces with it in its efforts to break the power of organized labor in the district.

Matters were fast approaching a crisis. The little town was overrun with idle men. They stood about singly and in groups or walked slowly up and down the rough wooden sidewalks on either side of the main street. The saloons and gambling houses were deserted; the men were quiet and orderly but terribly in earnest. To a close observer it was apparent that something was holding them in check; they were waiting—waiting with a stolidness that was ominous. Circulating among the men were the spies of the mine owners intent upon discovering the leaders in order that they might be arrested at the proper time. The task of these secret agents was not an enviable one; the slightest indiscretion on their part and their lives would pay the penalty—it required but a spark to fire the magazine.

Such was the state of affairs when the "Old Man," accompanied by several of the officers and directors of the Syndicate, appeared upon the scene. The train had hardly come to a stop before the small station when

a little switch engine slid in behind the President's private car, and dragged it out through the yards to the offices of the company. Before its occupants had set foot on the ground the news of its arrival was spreading over the mountain side. Later it was known that the various superintendents, managers, and local representatives of the Syndicate were in consultation with the directors.

Time was a valuable asset with President Hillman. Once a year, accompanied by his staff of clerks and stenographers and such directors as were necessary to his purpose, he made a personal inspection of his vast properties, and looked over the field for prospective investments. For some time past the reports from the Arapahoe district had been far from satisfactory. He was at first annoyed; as matters went from bad to worse he became angry, which frame of mind had progressed through varying degrees until it could only be regarded as acute.

The appellation of "Old Man" was used by friends and enemies alike, and was warranted not so much by his years, which numbered perhaps fifty, as the reputation he had made for himself in the financial and industrial worlds as a leader of men. His physical proportions were rather insignificant; but one had only to look into his steel gray eyes, and note the deeply set lines of his unnaturally pallid face whether in action or repose, to know that he was essentially a man of intellect—that heart and conscience had long since been relegated to the background. He possessed a nervous energy which was a power in itself, and gave to his speech, especially when angered, a sharpness that might be likened to the working of a steel trap, which in more ways

than one was suggestive of the man. He knew no will but his own, and to thwart it was to incur his undying enmity.

"Who are the ringleaders of this crowd? Those are the men we want first," he declared, regarding with keen displeasure the several superintendents and managers, after receiving their reports of the situation.

"It's pretty hard to say, sir; they're not doing much talking—they're playing a deeper game," said Jim Hedge, superintendent of the Gold Coin Mine.

"Well, who is the chief offender—we'll make an example of him to begin with; the moral effect will be salutary at least," snapped the President.

"Consolidated Properties has made most of the trouble for us, sir," said Jed Sharpley, manager of the Yellow Metal Mine. "They're running three eight-hour shifts and our men just naturally kick against doing ten-hour stunts."

"To be sure. I foresaw the result of the methods of our socialistic neighbors. We have fooled with them long enough; we must adopt more effective means of bringing them to terms."

From the time the emissaries of the big Syndicate had entered the district and inaugurated a system of spoliation and plunder by wrecking and crippling one mine after another until its helpless owners had been frozen out, or were compelled to dispose of their property on the terms of the oppressors, the trouble with the men had steadily increased. Previous to that time the mine owners and men had worked together in harmony, paying little heed to the happenings in the outside world,

each one satisfied to do his work and participate in the legitimate profits thereof.

The opposition to The Consolidated Properties had dated from the very beginning. Its owners had incurred the displeasure of this band of raiders by steadily resisting its attacks, and as it was generally conceded to be the most valuable of all the mines this was an offence not to be lightly condoned. The desire of the unscrupulous Syndicate to acquire the Properties on account of their value, gradually developed into a necessity as a means of protection to itself. The efforts of the elaborate wrecking system, flushed with success and unlimited money power, had been concentrated against this lone company. Suits of injunction, restraining orders, boundary disputes, tunnelling and counter-tunnelling, claims of stolen ores, clash of forces and recourse to law, bribery and corruption of courts and officers had followed fast and furiously. Each attack had been met fairly and squarely, apparently no effort being made to avoid the issue, and more than once a counter blow had been delivered that had covered the attacking party with consternation and confusion. Fraud and corruption had been met by dragging the fight into the open where fair play had been demanded by the public in no uncertain voice. Such an opponent had never been encountered before.

The system was in disgrace; it had utterly failed to accomplish the work set for it; it had even called for help. Excuses there were none to offer, for unlimited money had been at its disposal, and all things could be accomplished with money, according to its unwritten code. Every member of the corrupt body keenly felt the

displeasure of his chief, which had fallen upon the heads of the few in no uncertain manner. Matters had undeniably reached a serious stage—the great man had been compelled to take the field in person.

"This man Bill—Mister Bill," he said, with cynical emphasis, his glance of stern inquiry falling upon one after another of the men before him, "is the man we want?"

Several heads nodded acquiescence. "Land him and there'll be nothing to it but driving the whelps back into their holes," declared Jem Remsen, the local leader of the system. Remsen spoke with the assurance of a man who knew the strength of his opponent.

"That should not be a difficult matter. The district has been declared to be in a state of insurrection. The military is in control. Lives and property are in imminent danger. Riot may be precipitated at any moment. Those responsible for this state of affairs must be arrested. We will begin with the ringleader. We will let the law deal with him, and the law deals severely with such offenders. At least we can keep him out of the way sufficiently long to break his power over this crowd, and that will also serve to bring Consolidated Properties to terms."

"That means a big rumpus. The whole crowd will fight at the drop of the hat. Besides, he has five hundred picked men behind him that will make dirty work for the crowd that tries it on," said Remsen, very positively.

"Nonsense!" snapped the Chief, impatiently. "We have men here whose business it is to fight; they will make short work of him and his band of ruffians. Colonel Delefield," he said, turning abruptly to that officer,

"you will arrest this man without delay. I would suggest that you make a considerable display of force in case he and his fool followers are inclined to offer resistance. However, that is your affair, it is the man we want. We must have this Mister Bill at any cost."

CHAPTER II

THE MAN

A SHADOW suddenly fell across the threshold; a form appeared in the doorway. With one swift glance the man seemed to take in every detail of the situation. Slowly he removed his hat, the while he coolly and steadily met the look of inquiry of the man whose speech he had interrupted. The men had never met before yet each instinctively knew the other—no formalities of introduction were necessary. In that brief interval each man took the mental and physical measure of the other. No word had been spoken, yet every man in the room was conscious that a new force had come into their midst—a personality in striking contrast to that of their leader and one that must be reckoned with.

The man was apparently in the early thirties, full six feet in height, his splendid physical proportions offering mute evidence that nature and man had worked in harmony and wrought out a piece of handiwork that his fellows might well envy. The tan and glow of health and strength told no less plainly of winds and rains beating upon those sturdy features—no plant of the conservatory was this, but an oak seasoned in sunshine and in tempest. Seriousness and good nature were depicted in his face—a face at once expressive of a mental develop-

ment equal to the physical man. His rough brown corduroy trousers descending into the tops of his laced bootlets, his loose-fitting dark blue shirt and carelessly knotted black tie all seemed in peculiar accord with the simple bearing of the man.

"I am the man you seek, sir. My intrusion seems most timely," he said, in a quiet well modulated voice which seemed in striking contrast to the tensity of the situation.

"Colonel Delefield, your duty has become somewhat simplified—there's your man," said Mr. Hillman, his sharp nervous voice contrasting unpleasantly with the other.

A slightly perceptible movement of the features which if a trifle more pronounced might have suggested a smile, was the only apparent effect of this remark upon the young man.

"For the present this is a matter between you and me, sir. We can settle it peaceably, or—we can fight," he said, in the same quiet voice.

"I do not recognize you as representing any point at issue between us. You and your immediate followers will be arrested for the part you have taken in organizing the men into armed bodies, inciting riot, and in various ways working in opposition to law and order. You will be given ample opportunity to prove your innocence in a court of law. In the meantime we have nothing in common to discuss."

Again that slightly perceptible change of expression as he coolly regarded the man who had threatened him.

"We will waive formalities for the present," he said,

voice and manner assuming added force and dignity. "A greater issue is at stake than the matter of mere individual authority. It is a question of life and death, and you or I must be responsible. It is too great a responsibility for me to assume, and I cannot believe that you will knowingly take it upon yourself."

"Young man, when you play with the fire you must abide the consequences. Leaders of revolutions are generally burned by the fires of their own making; history will bear me out. You have incited these people to rebellion, and you must take the consequences."

"For my own acts I will be responsible. It is for your acts, and those of your unscrupulous hirelings that I refuse to be responsible. How far you are directly responsible, or how much you know of what has been done in your name and with your money, I have no means of knowing. I came here to tell you in order that you may decide for yourself. The extent of the cause is the measure of your responsibility, and you cannot evade it before your conscience or your God even though you whip the law around the stump and put me in your stead."

The great man fumbled the mass of papers before him; several of the directors exchanged glances; the superintendents and hirelings shifted uneasily in their chairs. A homely old truth had been thrust home which each man recognized in spite of himself, and was ashamed of his momentary weakness.

"As President of this company, I believe I am well informed concerning its affairs. I also have considerable information concerning you, the methods of your company, and your systematic efforts to injure our busi-

ness; in short, information that will make very good evidence at the proper time, which, if I mistake not, you will have considerable difficulty in explaining."

"I know what your reports tell you. They tell you that our men work shorter hours and receive more pay than your men; that we have taken away your best men and that the others are dissatisfied and demand more wages; that we have refused to take up your fight against the men notwithstanding your threats and intimidations; that I am a socialist and disorganizer, a menace to the best interests of the community, and that I must be gotten rid of at any cost."

"You are correct in your surmise, young man; they tell me all that and even more," said the President, very crisply.

"But perhaps they *don't* tell you that half your men are raw recruits drawing the wages of skilled laborers; that mere children appear on your pay rolls as drawing the wages of able-bodied men; that these poor creatures are forced to work long hours in hell holes that sap their very life; that hundreds are killed and injured and whole families driven to want and even starvation simply because human beings are cheaper than the protection that common decency should provide, to say nothing of what the law demands; that all your employees are compelled to purchase their supplies from the stores in which your agents are interested, and where they are systematically robbed of their earnings; that thousands of dollars you have paid for bribery and corruption of courts and individuals have gone into the pockets of your trusted minions; that your whole system is rotten to the core, and the blood-sucking leeches you employ

to do your dirty work have become poisoned from the leprous body on which they feed. And the irony of it all is that the poor devils are flayed by the very hands they enrich."

The blow came straight from the shoulder and landed on the weak spot of the body against which it was directed. The representatives of that body rose as one man in angry protest, but its head held them severely in check. Perhaps here was an explanation of the failure of the system to accomplish its work.

"You do not deny creating dissensions among our men by offers of higher wages and shorter hours, and taking such men as suited your purpose?" demanded Mr. Hillman.

"The men came to us because they are paid and treated like men. A large number of our men are stockholders in the company; it is the privilege of all. We are willing to share a certain proportion of the profits as well as the responsibility with the men. So far the result has shown us the soundness of our reckoning."

"So far, yes, but your experiment is only well begun. One of these days you will be stung by the serpent you are unconsciously nurturing. In the meantime we are the sufferers from your experiment. We are not realizing any profits from our investment, and shall be compelled to reduce rather than raise the wages of the men."

"Your company is steadily settling under the weight of its watered stock. You unloaded this worthless stock on the public at fabulous prices and pocketed the proceeds. Instead of the dividends you promised you are compelled to maintain an expensive litigation and a system of corruption that saps the very life of your

company. To carry on this system of jugglery you dignify by the name of finance, you would sacrifice every man, woman and child you can lay hands on."

"This is rank nonsense; you are a socialist of the darkest dye," exclaimed the President, losing his patience. "Such men as you are breeders of revolutions; you undermine the very foundation on which our government rests; you are traitors to the powers that build up and support that government—it is anarchy pure and simple."

"It is progress," declared the young man, with forcible conviction; "even though it frustrates the plans of a few bogusly capitalized industries, still its name is progress. Bribery and corruption and the despoilers of rights and liberties are its natural enemies—ever on the defensive—always on the run—never fighting fair. Progress needs no defense—I do not offer it."

"You and your kind delude yourselves with sophisms. The substantial progress of the race has been accomplished by the workers; the dreamers and the theorists are the backbiters that trail along in the rear of this great army of producers and doers they are never able to overtake. You are but a mere handful of stragglers; you will be trampled under foot when you attempt to stay the onward rush of this great army."

Slowly the young man turned and looked out of the door—out across the great stretch of rugged country to where the earth and sky seemed to meet. Slowly his eyes traversed the length of the mighty sweep of mountain ranges; from base to peak and into the blue azure above they seemed to roam. Scarce a sound disturbed the stillness of the room while outside a silence

almost ominous seemed to have fallen over the land—nature and man were in strange accord.

"There's a mightier power than the will of man at work," he said, with deep and abiding faith, his gaze still directed towards the distant mountain tops. "The power that placed those mountain ranges out there is the power that works for progress—man is but its plaything. History—that same history you referred to—is the record of its wonderful power; a record of progress—the emancipation of man. I am too small—too feeble—to expend my life's best energies combating such a power—I am content to go with the current."

"Enough of this nonsense!"

"I will tell you who are the real anarchists and traitors to our country," continued the young man, almost defiantly. "It is the men of your stamp that corrupt the best instincts of the youth of the nation; the men who buy and sell human beings that they may debase and debauch the very laws of which they loudly proclaim themselves the guardians; the men who are themselves slaves to a system that is slowly but surely eating at their vitals while they delude themselves that they are its masters. The men—"

"Colonel Delefield, arrest that man! I refuse to submit to further insult!" cried the President, fairly livid with rage.

Every man was on his feet in an instant; hands were on guns and faces were hard set. Every eye was directed towards the man against whom the command had been directed; a false move on his part and—but the man only smiled. With a smile even bland-like he looked into the flashing eyes of the angry Chieftain.

"Don't make any mistake," he said, with a confidence not to be mistaken, "you are not in a position to order my arrest. Your safety—your life—is in my keeping at this moment."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other, surprised into the query.

"I mean that your well being is so closely allied with mine that the two are inseparable. You have said that I have power over these men. I have—to a certain extent. I have exercised that power for several days past to prevent a clash between your small army of hired fighting men whose outrageous work you have countenanced, and now seek to support by the military, and the men you have forced into rebellion. There is a limit to my power, however, and it is about reached."

"Well?" impatiently demanded the other.

"I came here to make a last appeal to you to give the men a hearing; to investigate and see for yourself the justice of their claims; to give them fair play and reasonable hours and the treatment a human being deserves. I came to appeal to you as a man to consider the lives of men—"

"I fail to see how all this establishes any close relations between us," impatiently interrupted the President.

"I will make it clear to you. Down in the town and over among the hills are twenty-five hundred men angry and defiant and spoiling for a fight. Opposed to them are eight or nine hundred regulars, and a couple of hundred of your fighting men against whom the men have a special grievance. We are two hundred miles from the nearest point from which assistance can be

obtained; figure it out for yourself. If I fail to leave this office within fifteen minutes, or give evidence that I am free to do so, you will have to answer for it. You are the man against whom their hatred is directed; you are the man with whom they desire a reckoning. I don't think I have laid undue stress upon the serious nature of the situation."

"Whether you have or not is immaterial," said Mr. Hillman, very shortly. "I do not intend to argue the question, nor do I intend to give you the advantage of precipitating a conflict for which you seem so well prepared. I will give you until five o'clock this afternoon to come to such understanding with your followers as you deem advisable. You will then have the option of placing yourself in charge of Colonel Delefield, or compelling him to take you by force. The responsibility of the conflict of armed forces, if such there be, will therefore devolve upon you. This is my final word," declared the President, as he turned away.

Again that change of features—that barely perceptible smile—as the young man with a parting glance at the great man turned and left the office.

"Colonel Delefield, you are thoroughly familiar with the situation. I wish my ultimatum to that man carried out to the letter," said Mr. Hillman, with irritating sharpness.

"That, sir, I decline most emphatically to do," promptly declared the old war horse.

"Do I understand that you refuse to do your duty—to arrest the man who has incited the rebellion?" demanded the President, regarding the other almost incredulously.

"I do, most emphatically, in the light of my present understanding of the situation," replied the Colonel, unhesitatingly.

"Is there any doubt in your mind as to his culpability? Do you require any further proof? As for his bold talk —a mere bluff, not to be seriously considered. It is part of the game he is playing. He is simply using these poor fools to accomplish his own ends; but when he finds that we are in sober earnest he will very quickly come to terms. He is only a blustering boy carried away by the little brief authority he exercises over these men."

"He is a man if I ever saw one," boldly declared the Colonel. "So far he has only been playing with you. When you fired your heaviest guns he only smiled. Show me a man that can smile in the face of danger, and I'll show you a man—every inch of him—and a bad man to fool with."

"You seem to possess a very great admiration for this young man," said the President, looking at the other searchingly.

"I know a man when I see one; there are some men I want to know I have a fight with before I start one."

"You leave me no alternative but to believe that your very great respect for this particular man leads to an evasion of your duty—"

"Don't make any more mistakes," gruffly interposed the old soldier. "I was sent down here to maintain order, and I'll do it! But I don't take any orders from you, or do any of your dirty work. I'm not on your pay roll, and you don't own the United States Government,

at least not all of it—yet"; and the old fellow stamped angrily out of the office leaving the disgruntled Chief alone with his faithful followers.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT MAN'S DAUGHTER

CONSTANCE HILLMAN was the almost constant companion of her father on his annual trips. It was her season of rest and recuperation from the demands of an exacting society, and as much as she ever enjoyed anything she enjoyed these few weeks of careless indolence. Her father left her very much to her own devices as he had little time or thought for anything but the matters of business which seemed to occupy his every waking moment. She spent the greater part of the time in her own private apartment, reading, sleeping, or gazing idly out of the window. She occasionally allowed herself to be entertained by some of the business associates of her father, but for the most part these men failed to interest her.

There were exceptions, however, and Mr. Charles Francis Herringdon was proving rather a notable one. Business, that ever present bugbear, which seemed ever drawing men into its power and absorbing them body and soul, had not yet worked its spell over this young man. Mr. Herringdon was a young millionaire of a business turn of mind, as he rather prided himself, who had lately become associated with her father in several of his enterprises, and was making his first trip of inspection of the properties in which he was interested. He

was a follower rather than a worker—a necessary part of the machinery of the several companies in which he was a director. He voted as pleased the head of the company, and in this he was useful.

The urgency of the call and the haste to reach the scene of disturbance was diverting and became mildly exciting. The directors discussed the situation in all its bearings, and speculated upon the best means of bringing the men to terms. Their displeasure was most pronounced against the man who appeared to be the leader of the men. Had the man been as black as the reports made him he was a dangerous character to be at large, and the young woman doubted not that such was the case.

She was alone in the car this morning. For some reason her books seemed dull and uninteresting. She tried one after another only to find each a little more stupid than the other. Throwing them impatiently aside she went out on the platform of the car, where she stood for some time looking at the strange scene spread out before her. The fresh mountain air inspired her with a desire for exercise. She stepped down from the car and looked about her, undecided which way to go.

"You ain't gwain away, Miss?" queried a startled voice.

"Only for a short walk, Sam," she replied, rather impatiently.

"Better not go far, Miss. Mister Hillman give old Sam fits—sure enough!" he protested, to which the young woman paid no heed.

She walked slowly up the rising ground from where a better view of the valley could be obtained. She had

not proceeded far, however, before she came upon a well beaten trail which wound around the hill to one side of the town, and doubtless continued on to the mines whose smoking stacks she could see in the distance. She made her way along the path, occasionally stopping and looking off across the valley or up at the towering mountain peaks from some new point of vantage. Once she sat down and watched for some time the strange movements of a number of men down below. She continued her walk apparently unconscious of the distance she had gone, when a burly form suddenly loomed up in front of her and barred her way.

"Sorry, Miss, but you can't go beyant," said the man in strong Hibernian accents.

"And why not, pray?" she demanded, somewhat startled.

"Orthers, Miss."

"Whose orders—what orders?" she asked, mechanically.

"The boss, Miss—not to lave the Divil himself (axin' you pardon, Miss) go beyant me."

"Ah, yes, I understand," she said, somewhat relieved. "My father's orders, no doubt; I am Miss Hillman. I will go up in that little grove and rest a while before returning."

"Sorry, Miss—it's too bad you said a word—divil a word."

"What do you mean?"

"Sure, Miss, this be the enemy's camp; your name is a pass-word I couldn't take for the life of me—axin' your pardon again, Miss."

"Indeed! And so the man who gave you the orders

is Mister Bill—the man who is opposing my father?"

"Yes, Miss—Mister Bill, his own self. Sure he would let you through—"

"I have no desire to trespass. I shall return immediately," and turning abruptly she started back, only to find herself confronted by another man who came swinging briskly along the trail.

"Pardon me—you are returning to town? You will hardly be able to pass that way," he told her.

"And why not, pray?" she demanded, regarding him severely. "It is but a few moments since I came this way."

"I dare say; but a force of men have just been stationed a short distance back with orders to allow no one to pass."

"And was it all done for my especial benefit? Am I such a very dangerous character that I must be so carefully guarded against. It is the doings of that unspeakable man, Mister Bill, I presume."

"Well, yes, I believe the men are acting under his instructions, now that you mention it."

"What an intensely disagreeable man he must be!" she exclaimed, in great disgust. "It seems as though I had heard nothing the past two days but the mention of his odious name, and now I am confronted by his orders whichever way I turn."

"I regret your displeasure exceedingly—"

"Oh, I would like to meet him face to face! I would at least tell him what I think of him and his outrageous—"

She was interrupted by a strange exclamation, and turning indignantly upon the offender could discern

only the inscrutable back of Jerry, the faithful sentinel, who seemed to be deeply absorbed in a study of the distant mountain peaks.

"Nevertheless, I shall take my chances. Somebody should be dealt with severely for this outrageous treatment. Let me pass, sir."

"To insure you against further annoyance this man will accompany you."

"I refuse to be placed under guard. I do not require, nor shall I accept an escort. Oh, this is monstrous!"

"You will pardon my insistence; you will not be able to pass the guard—the orders are imperative."

"What is the meaning of these strange doings? Is the country in a state of revolution; or are we being invaded by an armed foe? In any event I refuse to return to town under guard. I shall remain right here for the present."

"You will again pardon me," he said, gently but firmly, "but it is imperative that you should return to town, and at once. You should not have ventured so far away; your friends will be needlessly alarmed by your absence. Their anxiety for your safety may seriously complicate matters. I must insist that you accept the escort of this man."

"Oh!" she angrily exclaimed. "To be ordered about and forbidden this and that, and finally given in charge of a—a desperado for aught I know—he certainly looks like one," she declared, bestowing a crushing glance on poor Jerry.

"Our ways and our people are as rough and crude as the country, but like the rich treasure in yonder mountain side, you will find many an honest heart con-

cealed by a rough exterior. You will suffer no embarrassment, Miss Hillman," he told her, very simply, as Jerry, in obedience to a nod from him, proceeded to lead the way down the trail.

He stood for a moment watching the young woman and her escort, and was about turning away when every sense became suddenly on the alert. Turning slowly around apparently interested in something transpiring down in the valley, but steadily watching one spot on the ground to the left of him, his right hand was gradually raised until it rested on the gun at his side. Suddenly facing squarely about, and drawing his gun with the same movement, he leveled it fair at a figure crouching behind a rock but a short distance away.

"How the devil?" exclaimed the man, too surprised for the moment to change his position.

"Coming events cast their shadows, Tenderfoot. Put up that gun—come down here," he ordered.

"I wasn't going to shoot," growled the other, putting away his gun in obedience to the command, and shambling out from his hiding place.

"What's your game?" he demanded, studying his man closely as he came towards him.

"No game. You didn't think I was going to shoot—"

"I'll tell you, as you seem to have some scruples about it yourself. You had not fully decided whether my life or death would be more to your advantage."

"No use denying there are some that would like to see you out of the way; they wouldn't lose much sleep if you happened to meet with an accident and—"

"Accidents have a market value? How are they rated

to-day?" he demanded, regarding the culprit with something like piteous contempt.

"Look here, Mister Bill, I know you don't like me, and I don't say but you've good enough cause for it, but I can be of use to you. I know what the other side are up to and—"

"Such information also has a market value?"

"Why not? You could afford to pay well for it."

"You are an impossible element in the consideration, Tenderfoot. We are fighting for right and justice—for our very manhood. You and your kind are not eligible to fight under that banner."

"You've made a good fight, and damn me, if I didn't hate you I'd like to see you win. I've no love for the crowd I'm with; they pay me well—that's all I ask. But they'll beat you in the end; the Old Man will just wear you out if he can't get you any other way."

"And you would advise me to make terms with the Old Man, which incidentally, will benefit you in some way, I presume?"

"I'm not saying it wouldn't; but that's neither here nor there. The Old Man would jump at the chance to buy you off. He would rather have you with him than against him. He knows you're worth more to him than the whole crowd he has around him. You could name your own price and —"

"Hand over Consolidated Properties and sell out my friends. Truly, Tenderfoot, you are a master of villainy."

"You could satisfy the whole crowd, and your conscience at the same time with the money you would get out of it; it will be better than losing it all as you

surely will if you persist in fighting the Old Man. He can give you everything a man has any use for; wealth, power, position—even a wife. Just play your cards right and you'll be a bigger man that the Old Man himself."

"Tenderfoot, I believe you pollute the very atmosphere," said the other, turning away in disgust.

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed Tenderfoot, with angry earnestness. "I'll tell you something now that perhaps you don't know. Even if you beat the Old Man—which is supposing more than will ever happen—you're not out of the woods. The old crowd is still on your trail and ready to take up the fight where the Old Man leaves off—one or the other is bound to get you."

"Thank you, Tenderfoot—you may go now," said the young man, with rather better grace than might have been expected.

A smile which gradually developed into broad proportions lighted up his face as he made his way over the hill.

"Tenderfoot," he said aloud, glancing back at the disappearing figure, "I must see that no harm comes to you; your peculiar talent must be turned to some good account."

CHAPTER IV

THE MASTER HAND

CHRIS ENGLER swung himself down from the cab of the big mountain climber which stood panting and heaving before the little station of Gold Dust. He glanced uneasily at his watch and then looked searchingly around, but apparently found little to satisfy him. Mechanically he walked around the big machine looking into an oil-cup here, wiping a bearing there, and testing a bolt in another place. This was the third time Chris had made the same round—something was clearly amiss.

Orders had been issued that a special train with President Hillman's private car attached should go out at four o'clock. A half hour before, Mont Lang, the driver of the engine, had hurriedly left the round house in response to an urgent summons from his home. It lacked but a few minutes of the hour, and he had not returned.

After the meeting in the forenoon President Hillman had very quickly decided that he could conduct his campaign to better advantage from a distance. He was compelled to admit that the situation was rather more serious than he had anticipated, and what was even more embarrassing, not to say awkward, his authority had been set at naught by the man from whom he had expected the greatest assistance. Colonel Delefield had openly

defied him; but there were, thanks to a great and just government, those from whom he would be compelled to take orders. The ringleader should be arrested and his plans carried out, and if fighting there must be, it was not necessary that he should be a party to it; the men had brought it on themselves, and they must abide the consequences. In a later interview with Colonel Delefield, while adopting less aggressive tactics than he had previously employed, he made it clear to that officer that orders would shortly come from a source which could not be disregarded, and it would be best for all concerned —especially for Colonel Delefield—to perform his duty, and arrest the man who was clearly responsible for the existing state of affairs, in case he refused to give himself up at the hour appointed.

Down in the town as the hours went by the men became more and more impatient. Apparently nothing from which any satisfaction could be derived had transpired at the meeting in the forenoon. Rumors flew thick and fast, some based on facts, others calculated to discourage the men or create dissensions among them. The man on whom they pinned their faith and with whose fortunes they had linked their own had been given the choice of surrendering himself to the enemy, or suffering forcible arrest at five o'clock. He had given no sign of his intentions—he had only said wait. They would not frustrate his plans—if plans he had—by disobeying his orders. They would wait until five o'clock—that was the time he had asked. But—and each man said it with deadly earnestness—there should be no arrest. With his arrest would disappear their last hope—nothing remained but to fight.

At four o'clock President Hillman looked at his watch and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. When several minutes had passed and no move had been made, he sent one of his clerks to ascertain the cause of the delay.

"No engineer!" he exclaimed, incredulously. "What's the meaning of this? I gave positive instructions that we should start promptly at four o'clock," and he went out to investigate for himself.

"I don't know, sir," said the superintendent, helplessly. "Something has happened to old Mont—he can't be found."

"Well, give me another man," said the President, impatiently. "My time is too valuable to be fooled away by a drunken engineer. Move lively, now."

"Sorry, sir, but there ain't another man in the camp that can take No. 10 down the mountain. There's only two on the road that we trust with a passenger, and the other is down below."

"Let the fireman take us down; I dare say he can do it if necessary," said the exasperated President, after a moment's thought.

"I don't reckon that Chris will undertake the job—we'll see what he says," said the superintendent, leading the way forward where the fireman was pacing up and down beside his giant charge.

"No, sir," said Chris, slowly shaking his head, "I don't cal'late I ought to undertake the job. If 'twere only a freight I'd do it in a minute."

"I was not aware that it was such a very difficult feat to take a train a few miles down a mountain—to a man who is supposed to know his business," said the President, with ill concealed disgust.

"It's a powerful grade, sir, and she has to get the air just right, or she might get away from me. Anyhow it's no time to experiment with a carload of people behind me," Chris insisted.

"I guess Chris is about right," said the superintendent.

Mr. Hillman turned away in disgust, and returned to his car, apparently deriving little satisfaction from the assertions of the men that the missing engineer might turn up at any moment.

A half hour later the situation remained unchanged, except, perhaps, for the growing uneasiness on the part of the President and his party, and a rumor that was spreading around the town of their predicament which caused a general movement of the crowd toward the station. Some were inclined to regard it as a huge joke on the "Old Man," but others saw in it a deeper meaning.

"The Old Man ain't gone yet," said Hank Kilburne, as he rode in amongst the crowd at the station, and pulled up beside one of his deputies.

"Nary a move. The Old Fellow may be on hand after all when the fun begins. I reckon he don't hanker much after that part of the game," said the other.

"I suspicion there may be them as have taken it upon themselves to invite him to stay—there's something mysterious goin' on. The Old Man is doin' the guessin' jest about now," said Ed Belden, who had just ridden up. "The crowd is gettin' mighty uneasy—there's got to be a show-down purty soon," he added, glancing around at the rapidly increasing crowd.

"The Old Man's gettin' nervous," said Hank, as the President appeared on the platform and looked about

him. "He don't like the looks of things, and I 'low I don't blame him much."

"The boys over yonder are gettin' ready for trouble," said Ed, a moment later, as he discerned a movement among the soldiers, "and the crowd over on the hills is moving this way. There's trouble comin' fast enough. It's up to Mister Bill; and I 'low I hope he knows what he's doin'."

" 'Bout time he was showin' up, 'pears to me," growled Hank. "Wouldn't take much to set things to goin' 'bout now."

At a quarter of five, when Colonel Delefield with the greater part of his command appeared upon the scene and quietly stationed his men around the station, and in various commanding positions, the crowd numbered close upon two thousand, and was rapidly increasing; incidentally, it was fast developing the temper of the mob.

It was a strange—a dangerous crowd of human beings. Hundreds of those breasts heaved with pent-up passions—passions as primeval as ever beat in human forms. The instinct of self-preservation—the instinct of the wild animal that turns upon and rends itself—was the force that must be reckoned with. There were those who knew the temper of that crowd; they knew they were powerless to control it. Only a master hand could hold it in check—the master hand was sorely needed.

Over the hill from the direction of Consolidated Properties appeared a horseman. Down the hill and along the dusty roadway he came, leaving a cloud of dust behind. Straight on through the stragglers on the outskirts of the town, on through the mass of human beings gathered

about the station, straight to the platform of the President's car he rode before drawing rein. A strange hush fell upon the scene where but a moment before strife was in the very atmosphere. The crowd waited with bated breath—it was withholding judgment.

"Well, young man, I am glad to see that you have come to your senses," said Mr. Hillman, looking down at his opponent with apparent satisfaction. "You have come to give yourself up, I infer."

"No, sir, I have come to talk business," briefly replied the young man, as he swung himself out of the saddle.

"Business!" angrily exclaimed the President, "there's no business that we can discuss. I should have left here an hour ago; I am leaving at any minute. Colonel Delefield has my instructions; I would advise you to confer with him."

"There is ample time to discuss our affairs," coolly replied the other. "I may as well tell you frankly, that you will not leave the camp until we come to a thorough understanding."

"You threaten me?" demanded the great man, angrily.

"I am speaking plainly; I cannot afford to do otherwise, nor can you afford to have me."

"And so you and your unscrupulous followers are responsible for the sudden disappearance of my engineer; you are keeping me here by force. This is infamous!!—a fool act for which you will pay dearly—mark me!"

"If there is any fighting to be done I intend that you shall bear a certain portion of the responsibility, inas-

much as it will be done at your insistence. Now, then, is it business, or—fight?"

"I might have suspected such treachery. You have me again at a disadvantage. I have no doubt you are foolish and reckless enough to carry out your threats. For the sake of my friends—my daughter—I am compelled to listen to you. Will you come inside, or—do you prefer neutral ground?" inquired the President, with very poor grace.

"No, sir," promptly replied the young man as he climbed up on the platform and followed the other into the car. "We can settle the preliminaries very quickly and—without assistance," he said, as they entered the car and found themselves in the presence of the other directors. "When we understand each other, it will be time enough to submit our views to those interested with us."

"Come into my private apartment," said Mr. Hillman, leading the way. "Now, then, what is this business—what do you want?"

"I want all the suits and injunctions pending against Consolidated Properties withdrawn at once. I want you to relinquish your claims against certain other properties on which you have no just claim. I want a well defined policy for the future and a complete change in your methods of business—this for myself, and my company. For the men—your men—I bespeak your consideration. They only ask for fair treatment. You cannot do less in justice to yourself, to say nothing of justice to them, than to give it to them."

"Your demands are exceedingly modest, young man," said Mr. Hillman with contemptuous sarcasm. "Do you

think I have no alternative but to submit to your dictation. Are you fool enough to think that I would be bound by any promises made under threats of bodily injury?"

"No. Threats mean but little unless backed by the power to enforce them. I happen to have that power."

"In that case I advise you to show your hand—this is no time for idle words. What is this wonderful power you hold?" demanded the President, with irritable impatience.

"The railroad—this railroad," replied the young man, with forcible emphasis. "Consolidated Properties and its friends control The New Mexico Consolidated Railroad."

"It's false!" cried the astonished Chief. "It's false—you cannot deceive me with such a fool trick. I happen to know just where the control of the railroad rests; I have made it my business to know, and before long it will be under the control of the Eastern Syndicate."

"It is no trick, but the solemn truth which I can prove to your satisfaction. While you have been attempting to secure control of the railroad by the same unscrupulous methods you employed to gain possession of the mines, a corporation in which Consolidated Properties is the principal holder has been acquiring the stock, and to-day secured the controlling interest."

"Even so?"

"Your mines—your entire property in this district—are therefore practically in our power."

"Am I to understand that you threaten to use that power to compel me to accede to your outrageous de-

mands?" inquired the President, considerably subdued by the sudden turn of affairs.

"Precisely—if you force me to that extent. I ask only simple justice for myself and the men whose fight I have made my own because our interests were one. We were compelled to fight for our very existence."

"This is a matter that I must lay before my directors; we must have time to consider," said the President, finally.

"Very well, sir. I will return in an hour for your decision."

The feelings of a certain young woman were too conflicting to permit of analysis while this interview was in progress. She had made a sudden and disconcerting discovery. She had been in the power of this same unscrupulous man; she had even told him—what had she told him? She watched him as he mounted his horse and rode away through the crowd which quietly dispersed apparently in obedience to a few words from him —the crowd that but a few minutes before was a wild jeering mob of which she stood in mortal terror. What strange power did he hold over these men? She knew not what to make of such a man, nor could Mr. Herringdon throw much light upon this particular subject.

Late that night the little town was a scene of great rejoicing when it became known that a satisfactory understanding had been reached between the directors of the Eastern Syndicate and the representatives of the men, and that work in the mines would be resumed without delay. Early in the morning the regular train to which was attached the private car of President Hillman pulled out on schedule time, old Mont occupying his

accustomed seat in the cab. The soldiers also took their departure next day much to the satisfaction of the townspeople, as well as the men themselves, including their blunt old Colonel, who was too much of a soldier to relish such duty as he had been called upon to perform.

CHAPTER V

"DADDIE"

ALTHOUGH peace had been declared and each side seemed desirous of adjusting itself to the new conditions as rapidly as possible, there was more or less friction which gave indications of smouldering fires. The heat of passion had been too thoroughly aroused to be at once laid cold. The services of the strike-breakers and the crowd of deputies and fighting men were no longer required; a goodly number of the latter, however, seemed in no hurry to take their departure, and immediately proceeded to whoop things up at a lively rate, and made themselves still more conspicuous by loud threats against certain individuals who had incurred their displeasure. Their presence was a menace to the peace of the community; they were keeping alive a spirit of resentment which sooner or later must find expression. The townspeople were in no mood to be trifled with; they had rights which must be respected. The day following the departure of the soldiers came the first outbreak which for a brief moment seemed likely to develop serious consequences, but the promptness with which it was suppressed seemed to have a salutary effect on the belligerents.

The quiet of the early morning was suddenly broken by the ominous reports of three shots following one after

the other in quick succession. In a twinkling the main street of the little town became a scene of wild excitement. Shopkeepers with their early morning patrons rushed to their doors; unkempt heads protruded from second-story windows; blear-eyed and surly stragglers lurched awkwardly out of the saloons; the small restaurants and Chinese chop-houses added their quota to the motley throng. All eyes were immediately focused upon a strange appearing individual who had taken up a position in the middle of the street, and in loud but somewhat incoherent speech was proclaiming his ability to maintain it against all comers. He was recklessly flourishing his shooting-iron, and inspired doubtless, by his rapidly increasing audience, proceeded to cast maledictions of an equally confused character upon the community at large, and upon one Mister Bill in particular, against whom he seemed to have a special grievance.

"Tenderfoot's lookin' for trouble, sure enough," growled the proprietor of the leading mercantile establishment, as he proceeded to barricade his windows against the intrusion of stray bullets.

"He's sure enough come to the right place—it's jest layin' 'round here loose," said Hank Kilburne, as he elbowed his way through the crowd in front of the store. "Better get inside, ladies," he gruffly admonished, "no tellin' where the lightnin' will strike."

Crack! Crack! followed two more shots evidently fired at random, the first, shattering a pane of glass in one of the saloons, and the second, kicking up a small cloud of dust in the street. A rapid scampering to get under cover, and a wild rush from all sides followed this second display of careless marksmanship, and the reckless in-

ebriate who had so brazenly courted trouble suddenly found it closing in about him. In the excitement of the first mad rush the crowd seemed to literally wrestle and struggle with itself, and to the angry desire of each man to lay violent hands on the offender may be attributed his momentary respite from its summary vengeance.

Suddenly above the muttered growls and curses a warning cry was raised. A horse and rider came tearing down the street at breakneck speed, and not until the animal seemed about to plunge into the very midst of the struggling mass did the rider draw violent rein, bringing his horse to his haunches, scattering men right and left, and enveloping the crowd in a cloud of the heavy yellow dust that lay inches deep on the roadway.

"Mister Bill!" cried a chorus of the onlookers, who had recognized the reckless rider from their various points of vantage.

"Tenderfoot was lookin' for him, and now he's found him," sarcastically observed one of a group of bystanders.

"I don't cal'late he had any pressin' business with Mister Bill," dryly remarked one of his companions.

"Looks like Mister Bill has uncommon business with him—'peared sort of hurried like, the way he lit into that crowd," said another.

Simultaneously with the pulling up his horse the man had thrown himself from the saddle, and before the crowd had recovered from the surprise occasioned by his unceremonious arrival he had forced his way into its very midst, and was standing face to face with the man who but a moment before was proudly proclaiming his desire for such a meeting. As the new-comer was rec-

ognized the tension on all sides seemed suddenly to relax, and as one man the crowd fell slowly back. For a brief interval of strange and almost ominous quiet the two men regarded each other in silence.

"I'll trouble you for that gun," he said, and the cool insistence of his demand seemed to leave the other no alternative but to hand over the troublesome shooter. "I believe that is your horse," he continued, in the same even voice, dropping the gun carelessly into his own side strap, and indicating by a nod of his head the animal in question, "and the next time you have business in this camp your fireworks can be dispensed with—to your advantage," he added, significantly.

He stood quietly watching the movements of the now thoroughly cowed and considerably sobered belligerent, who lost no time in mounting his horse, and making off down the trail. Turning to the expectant crowd, which seemed at a loss to understand this informal disposition of so dangerous a character, a good-natured smile spread slowly over his bronzed countenance.

"Sorry, boys," he said, "to break into your game so abruptly, but the fact is I have a special interest in that chap, and I don't want any harm to come to him—just yet. You gave him a lesson he will not soon forget."

"All right, Mister Bill, if you're willin' to let it go at that, guess we can stand it," replied one of the rough fellows, which seemed to voice the general sentiment, and the crowd quickly dispersed.

"Come on, Mexico!" he called, as he took leave of his companions, and made his way briskly along the sidewalk, "come on, old chap, we'll go to breakfast," glancing over his shoulder to see that his summons was obeyed.

Turning abruptly from the main street, he struck off up the hill, Mexico following close behind and wagging his ears with equine consciousness of this special mark of attention from his master. From several of the small cabins came hearty salutations and an occasional invitation to stop and have a "bite," which were all good-naturedly declined without interruption to the brisk pace he was setting until one more peremptory than the others seemed to compel a momentary halt.

"Mornin', Mister Bill," called a cheery feminine voice from the porch of the last cabin. "Jim 'lowed you might stop and have a snack with him. Dad sent us up some bran new store coffee, and Jim says I beat anything he ever did see makin' ranch biscuit—and I 'low I jest about beat myself this mornin'."

"Ah, Molly, you are a sad tempter! You certainly do know my weakness," he laughed, pausing for a moment, "but you must excuse me this time. Ling gave me strict orders to return to breakfast. Something very mysterious is going on—he has some great surprise for me. You see, I can't take any chances. Thank you, Molly," he said, as he proceeded on his way quite unconscious that Molly's bright eyes seemed suddenly to lose interest in their work, and followed him until he was lost to sight up the trail.

He swung briskly along the tortuous trail, but had not proceeded far before he discovered a strange figure but a short distance ahead of him. As he came up with the mysterious stranger, she suddenly turned and confronted him.

"Dad's gal!" he exclaimed, in evident surprise. "I thought you—"

"Yes, you thought I was dead. Well, I am—to everything decent and respectable. This miserable body still breathes, but dad's gal is dead," she replied, in a harsh, metallic voice with an evident effort to repress any natural feeling she might have felt.

"Where have you been all these years, Daddie?" he inquired, with kindly interest.

"Going from bad to worse pretty much all the time, I reckon. It ain't so hard when everybody gives you a kick to help you along. From the time Tenderfoot came to our camp over there in Colorado with his smooth tongue, and I believed his fine promises, and broke dad's old heart, I've been on that trail. Don't think I want your pity—I didn't come up here for that," she hastened to assure him, as if ashamed of the momentary weakness she had allowed herself.

"No, Daddie—I understand. Go on," he told her kindly, as if he read her thoughts.

"It ain't a fair deal—the cards are stacked—when a smooth-tongued devil can play his game to the limit with a young un' that don't know no more about the world than she learned from her old dad and some rough old miners, and who never had any companions but the wild things she found in the woods and made friends with because she was almost as wild as they," she told him, with bitterness of subdued heart pain and remorse. "But what's the use!" she cried, impatiently, "you know all about it, and I'm only wasting your time when I've no business even speaking to you."

"Where do you live, Daddie—what are you doing here?"

"I live down there among the shanties—in hell. I came

up here this morning to warn you. Tenderfoot would do you harm if he could—he hates you from the bottom of his wicked black heart. He is jealous of your success, and blames you for all of his failures. He was drinking down there all night, and boasted that he had you on the hip at last, and was only waiting his time to throw you. I don't know his game, but he and his pals are pretty sure of their cards or he wouldn't be so reckless."

"And so you came to warn me, Daddie—that was good of you. But I don't fear him—his bark is worse than his bite."

"I know you don't fear him, Mister Bill. You could crush every bone in his miserable body in a fair fight, but he don't fight in the open—he strikes from behind. I know what you did this morning—I saw it all. You saved his cowardly life when his threat to kill you was hardly cold on his lips. Somehow," she hesitated, "somehow, I should like to thank you, only I know you would do the same thing for a yaller dog; besides, you don't want thanks from such as me."

"I know only Daddie—dad's gal still lives to me," he gently replied, stroking Mexico's soft muzzle which rested against his shoulder. "She was as wild and sweet and pretty and pure a mountain flower as ever grew. A cruel hand plucked the innocent and helpless flower to please a passing fancy—the flower was not to blame."

"Those are the first kind words I've heard in years," she cried, covering her face with her hands, and bursting into tears. "Oh! that I might wake up and find myself Daddie once more, and all the rest a hideous dream. If only a kind and encouraging word had been given to me

sometimes I might have been different and better. Oh! why are harsh words so free—so easy to give?"

"You have been unfortunate, Daddie, in seeing only that side—"

"But you—you respect all of God's creatures no matter whether they are poor devils of men and women, or nobody's dog with a broken leg that you pick up in the street, and carry home to your cabin—Oh, yes, I know! You know that we have hearts and feelings as well as the men that make us what we are. You know that we don't all have the same chance, and maybe some of the fine folks that think we poison the air they breathe wouldn't be so much better if they got the same start—maybe some of us might be pitied as well as kicked and cussed. But I mustn't keep you here no longer," she cried, stifling her sobs, "I came to warn you and—to ask something of you."

"What would you ask of me, Daddie?"

"I know you will understand," she said, with some hesitation, "and it's not so much to ask—you. You will do it anyhow, but I shall feel better for asking. He has made me what I am, but I don't hold any spite against him, anyhow I don't want any revenge. But he has an old mother somewhere East that ain't so many more years to live, and if it's any satisfaction for her to know he's alive, I'm willing for her to have it. His name is my name, which ain't much to brag about, but it means something even to me—"

"I know, Daddie."

"But some time," she continued, her eyes flashing, and her whole demeanor undergoing a sudden change, "they may get you into a corner, and you will have to fight back.

If he gets in your way, don't take any chances, but crush him—crush him as you would a snake. You have too much at stake—too much depends upon you—to give the pack barking and snarling at your heels a chance to pull you down. It's not for him, but for his old mother, and—Daddie. Good-bye, Mister Bill, and God bless you," she cried, thrusting out her hand, only to as quickly draw it back, and darting past him, rushed wildly down the trail.

He watched her until she disappeared, and then proceeded on his way more slowly and thoughtfully. Mexico trailed along unbidden and apparently forgotten for some distance, when slowly and with seeming solicitous inquiry, the intelligent head was thrust gently forward over his master's shoulder.

"That's right, Mex, you rascal, I'm not very sociable this morning," he said to his faithful follower, pausing for a moment and stroking the animal's head. "But you must forgive me this time, old fellow, and we'll not allow it to occur again. Come on now, before we get into any more trouble, and we'll see what wonderful surprise Ling has for us."

CHAPTER VI

LING'S "S'PLISE"

THE cabin towards which the young man was making his way differed little in external appearance from several others in its immediate vicinity, but in the interior the individuality of its owner was distinctly in evidence. One side of the large room was given over almost exclusively to a rather imposing collection of books; he had gathered about him a well-selected company of entertaining and instructive companions. On the opposite side of the room was a large drafting-board arrangement, drawers and shelves containing specimens of rocks and ores, jars and bottles of dust and dirt, all carefully labeled and arranged. Several easy chairs, three or four large lamps, a couch on which was piled a small mountain of pillows, and a large square table in the center of the room, made up the conspicuous furnishings of the cabin. Amid these homely but comfortable surroundings he spent many solitary hours —alone but never lonely—frequently working far into the night over some complex problem of finance, law, or mechanical detail pertaining to the mines. His simple life and temperate habits enabled him to perform seemingly herculean labors, but which in reality were little more than the natural expression of a healthy and well-balanced mind and body. Aided by an indomitable will

to conquer every obstacle that stood in his way, he had not only made himself familiar with the various trades and professions necessary to the development and successful working of mines, but had made himself practically an expert in several of the departments. Like most men who succeed in mastering themselves, no less than their professions, he was extremely modest concerning his abilities, and performed his manifold duties without apparent effort, and little or no friction with the large number of men under his immediate supervision.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, boys—I was delayed down below," he briefly explained upon his arrival at the cabin, as he relieved Mexico of saddle and bridle and turned him loose. "Breakfast ready, Ling?" he inquired, as the China boy's grinning countenance appeared at the cook-room window.

"Him all leddy, Mister Bill—heap good s'plise," he chuckled, as he returned to his work.

The "boys" were apparently fifty years or more of age, David Bishop and Joseph Sutter, by name, co-workers and directors in the big mining company. They occupied a nearby cabin, and "grubbed" with the young man at a common table.

"We know all about it, Mister Bill," said Joe, as he led the way into the cabin.

"Seems like you took a mighty sight of trouble to save the hide of that good-for-nothin' Tenderfoot," growled Dave, in evident disapproval, as they took their places at the table.

"Well, yes, it might appear that way, David—from your point of view."

"Don't see what difference the p'int of view makes,"

returned Dave, with considerable warmth. "He's a no-account Tenderfoot from any and every p'int of the compass."

"Even so, I could not stand by and see the poor devil used as a football—or worse," said the young man, apparently not in the least disturbed by the disapproval of the elder men.

"You didn't have to break your neck gettin' into the scrimmage," Joe suggested with embarrassing frankness.

"I believe in lettin' natur' take her course. I reckon she knows best, and 'peared like she had some dirty work on hand this mornin' when you jumped in and upset things. Mighty serious business interferin' with natur'," Dave solemnly declared.

"That chap has been in this 'ere country for nigh on to fifteen years to my knowin', and he's a tenderfoot yet —and he'll never be no different. He's mighty handy pickin' up low-down tricks, but nothin' decent 'pears able to stick to him," said Joe.

"Great excitement in China this mornin'," said Dave, under his breath, as Ling trotted briskly into the room, and placing a steaming bowl of mush before each man, shuffled out again grinning and chuckling to himself. "Runnin' under purty high pressure—liable to blow up if he don't let off steam middlin' soon. What do you cal'late Tenderfoot's up to now, Mister Bill?" he inquired, returning to the subject under discussion.

"Any idee what low-down mischief he's up to?" asked Joe, as a reply was not forthcoming.

"Yes, I have several ideas, but they will not tend to raise the gentleman in your estimation."

"Let her go, Mister Bill—he sure can't go no lower," said Dave.

"Well, Dave, my ideas, like the points of your compass, all tend to one conclusion. Tenderfoot and his pals are spying on Consolidated Properties in the interest of certain Eastern capitalists."

"What!" shouted astonished Dave Bishop, staring at the young man in open-mouthed amazement, "and knowin' all that you jump in and save his miserable life? That's what I call puttin' a bounty on a chap's cussedness."

"Some crowd or other seems to be holdin' a gun at our heads most of the time; and I reckon they will so long as they think it's worth their while," said Joe, with keen disgust.

"Seein' as how you've been kind enough to give the varmit a rope to hang us with, what are we goin' to do about it? Jest hang 'round sort of easy-like, and wait to be strung up?" inquired Dave, with grave sarcasm.

"That is only another point of view, David. I have given him a rope, yes—to hang himself," replied the young man, quietly amused at the surprise and indignation of the elder men.

"I 'low I don't see much beyond the p'int of my nose, Mister Bill," said Dave, quite helplessly.

"It ain't so clear to me as it might be," Joe was forced to admit.

"Well, then, it occurred to me that so much general cussedness concentrated in one individual might be made to serve some good purpose if it could only be rightly directed."

"I pass," said Dave, with a hopeless shake of his head.

"I ain't doubtin' but you'll do what you say, Mister Bill, but I'm mighty curious to know how you expect to turn the current of a river and make it run up stream."

"By me, too—I ain't in the game. How you goin' to do it, Mister Bill, if it ain't no great secret?" inquired Joe, with considerable curiosity.

"To be perfectly frank, Joe, I don't know; but I thought I might figure it out now that I have the general dimensions of the problem," quietly replied the young man, whose appetite seemed not in the least affected by the serious aspect of the situation in the estimation of his companions.

"You can't do it none too quick to my way of thinkin', Mister Bill," said Dave, very positively.

"We agree perfectly on that point—"

"What's happened to that highbinder now?" exclaimed Dave, as a wild Mongolian yell rang out. "I was feared he'd blow up," he solemnly affirmed. An unintelligible jumble of broken English, and a rapid scampering of feet followed the first wild outbreak, and Ling burst into the room, a pitiable picture of tearful consternation and helpless despair.

"Old Mexico, he velly bad horse—him no good!" he cried, wiping his eyes with his white apron, and with difficulty refraining from sobbing outright. "S'plise all gone—Mexico eat him all up, Mister Bill."

"What was the surprise—what did old Mexico eat, Ling?" inquired the owner of the maligned animal, very seriously.

"Mister Bill, he say apple pie heap good—he like him velly much. Me send long way off and get apple—make two velly fine apple pies—heap big. Me put 'em on shelf

out doors, old Mexico come along and eat him one—like him velly good—eat him two—all gone—no more. Mister Bill get no s'plise—old Mexico catch 'em all—me heap mad!" he cried, and fled from the room deaf to all commiseration.

"You'll sure have to take the will for the deed this time, Mister Bill," said Dave, more soberly than was his wont. "There's a sight more human natur' inside his yaller hide than I had any idee."

CHAPTER VII

THE TEST OF THE METAL

IN the still gray light of the early dawn, high up on the summit of the hill rising steep and abrupt above the little town, might have been discerned the solitary figure of a man outlined against the sombre mountain side. Straight and silent he stood, gazing steadfastly off into the distance. At his feet lay his sole companion, a splendid pointer, that now and again looked up inquiringly at his master, and receiving no acknowledgment of his presence closed his eyes and possessed his canine soul in peace. As the child to the father was this little town—this thriving field of industry—to him who stood like a sentinel of the night watching over its sleep. He had seen it grow with strong and sturdy strides from the infant to man's estate; he had seen it steadily acquiring the power that was to turn upon and dispute possession with him who gave it birth. The time had come. All his earlier efforts, his trials and triumphs, had been but the preparation for the final struggle that must now be fought to victory or defeat. That which was his by right of discovery, the fruits of his labors—even his life, if circumstances required—were the spoils demanded by his powerful and unscrupulous enemy.

His had been the first hand to drive a stake on that hillside when, only a little more than four years before,

he and his two companions with their small pack-train had climbed slowly and wearily up from the valley in quest of the rich veins of mineral which he believed lay hidden among those rugged hills. Day after day they had toiled on in the same monotonous, discouraging, yet persistent search, until their patience was finally rewarded, and the secret hiding place of nature's treasure was laid bare. Almost immediately the hillside and surrounding country echoed to the sound of pick and drill. A camp sprang up in a night—a town seemed to emerge from the very mountain side. Wonderful tales of the fabulous wealth stored in these hills spread broadcast over the land, and hundreds flocked to the new Eldorado. Companies large and small were exploited, and their shares of stock greedily taken by a susceptible and speculative public almost before the ink was dry on the certificates, or a clod of earth turned on the claims. A monster company to work the mountain side on a mammoth scale was put into operation, with a facility which spoke not less eloquently for the marvelous energies of its promoters, than for the credulity of the public. Its stock was quickly at a premium, and to meet the insistent demands of this same credulous public, its accommodating promoters doubled, and finally trebled the stock, which went soaring to fabulous figures. There seemed no limit to the possibilities of these wonderful properties as viewed by their promoters. A railroad was indispensable to the successful working of this mammoth plant, and the project was carried through with the same wild hurrah that had characterized their previous operations. While excitement ran at fever heat, and speculation was rife as to the point the stock would ultimately reach, there sud-

denly came from out an apparently clear sky a blinding and stupefying crash that shook the new company to its very foundations. Without a moment's warning a report went forth from the mines that the veins, which were popularly supposed to be inexhaustible, had been lost. Down tumbled the stock, the phenomenal gains of weeks melting away in a night. Not until the stock had fallen considerably below its par value and thousands of the shareholders shaken out, were the veins picked up—or so reported from the mines—and the stock permitted to climb slowly back into popular favor. For a while all seemed serene, and the confidence of the public was once more restored, when the mines were suddenly discovered to be flooded, and down went the stock to even a lower figure than before—in short, the properties had simply been made the tool of the few to gull the many.

In the adjoining claims a smaller company had sunk its shafts, and had successfully prosecuted its work of development and production. Unfortunately for its owners, however, their more modest property was made to suffer through the erratic movements of the larger company, as the same conditions were generally supposed to prevail in each. They rarely profited by these fluctuations as they had no means of ascertaining the movements of the stock-jobbers only as their own stock went soaring up or tumbling down hard on the heels of their neighbor's—they were as much in the dark as was the public at large.

Finally, in self defence, they succeeded, with the assistance of capital interested on the strength of the known value of their own property, and the real, or supposed value of their neighbor's, in securing control of the big

company. Instead of freeing themselves from the influence of the stock-jobbers, they now found themselves the direct object of attack of their former neighbors, who lost no opportunity of harassing them at every turn.

The properties had been so conspicuously before the public and their wonderful possibilities so strongly credited despite their erratic movements, that a phenomenal "strike" was believed to be only a question of time, and the susceptible followers seemed ever willing to take at least one more chance rather than to miss the golden opportunity of their lives, as they seemed to regard it. Under these circumstances very little was required to start the stock moving up, and even less to topple it down, the new owners being still helpless to prevent the violent fluctuations.

In the meantime the Eastern Syndicate had invaded the field, and the Properties almost immediately became the bone of contention of the two great money powers, each employing its own peculiar methods. While the big Syndicate had now been effectually disposed of, the immediate resources of the company, never large, had practically been exhausted in the long fight with its powerful rival, and in securing a controlling interest in the railroad. To complicate matters, the old crowd had succeeded in forcing the price of the stock down to the lowest point in its history, and gave every evidence of their intention as well as their ability to keep it down, thus preventing its owners from realizing on their holdings. This, then, was the latest invention of the enemy. The trap had been laid with a cunning appreciation of the necessities of the company when it should emerge from its fight with the Syndicate.

Money—a considerable sum—must be forthcoming for further improvement and development of the mines, or operations would soon cease. Clearly the old enemy was a menace to the prosperity of the Properties; he must be disposed of, and that most effectually, before anything like permanent prosperity could be hoped for.

Such was the situation confronting the young president and manager of the properties. Such was the problem with which he had been wrestling nearly the whole night long. Had he been over ambitious and taken upon himself too great a responsibility—a responsibility which older men had declared was beyond his years and experience? Had he escaped the snares of one enemy only to fall into the pit of another? Were those who had invested their money at his solicitation and because of their faith in him to suffer a loss—was he to fail them at the crucial time? Must he throw up his hands and surrender himself and his friends to their common enemy? Must he, indeed?

Erect and rigid he stood—deep his thoughts and tense his gaze. Stranger alike to weakening back, or quaking knees was that superb physique. Admit defeat—not until he was laid on his back. Fight—to the very last ditch. Throw up his hands—never.

Slowly the sun rose over the distant mountain tops and streaked the east with gray; warmth and light had come upon the earth. Slowly the tension of his features relaxed; a softer light shone in his eyes—a smile was on his lips. Night was past, and day had dawned.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, glancing about him as from a sudden awakening, "I have it at last, old fellow!" he laughed, stooping down and fondling the patient animal

that sprang to his feet at the first sound of his master's voice. "You are a good dog, Seneca—you have been very patient with your morose old master. We'll go home now. It is a wise dog that knows his limitations," he genially declared, as he straightened up, and made ready to descend the trail.

"Ah! 'Tis grand—this old world of ours!" he exclaimed, with almost reverential simplicity, as he paused a moment to contemplate the wondrous scene of changing lights and shadows. "'Tis truly a marvelous handiwork," he gently breathed, "a glorious habitat for man. Oh, you poor devil, man!" he sighed, after a short interval of silent contemplation, his mood suddenly changing. "How you fight and kill! How you fawn and grovel! How you debase and debauch your better self in the mad struggle for the paltry things of earth which leave the richest of your kind but the merest pauper compared with the wealth you cast aside—the wealth of soul exchanged for the dross of earth, because you are too mad to heed—too blind to see. Verily, the ways of man surpass all understanding—'tis but a poor tribute he offers to the Creator of this great and wonderful universe. No, Seneca, I am not talking to you, but to a very superior creature called a man, who is heartily ashamed of himself, and his little insignificant thoughts. Lead on, you rascal—we have schemed enough."

"Figured it out, Mister Bill?" inquired Dave, as the young man strode briskly into the office a few minutes later. "I reckon you turned out purty early this mornin'—or maybe you didn't turn in?"

"Leave for Denver to-night, Dave," he briefly replied.

"You don't say so? I reckon you didn't lose your sleep for nothin'. Whose goin' to run the works while you're gone?"

"For the next few weeks they will be run for the benefit of certain individuals who are interested in our affairs. We will give Tenderfoot and his pals all the rope they want."

"All right, Mister Bill, anythin' you say goes even to blowin' the works sky high."

"We will try the effect of a little explosive agency on the other fellow before taking the treatment ourselves, Dave."

"Mighty little difference between rope and powder—lands a chap in purty much the same place, I reckon."

"Depends upon which end of the rope you happen to be attached, Dave. Don't forget that in your reckoning. For the present we shall devote our best efforts to keeping away from the business end of the string. Any objections to offer?"

"Nary a one, Mister Bill. That suits your Uncle Dave down to the ground."

CHAPTER VIII

NO FLAW

MR. WINSOR GODDARD, banker, mining man and several times millionaire, of Denver, Colorado, was seated at his desk in his private office in the rear of the large banking room looking over his morning mail. Close at hand lay a telegram at which he occasionally glanced as if some further meaning or perchance a different interpretation might be drawn from the brief message. When the last letter had received his attention he called his chief clerk, with whom he held a brief consultation, and to whose care he consigned the pile of letters. When he was alone he again slowly read the telegram, settled himself comfortably in his chair, and apparently gave himself up to deep meditation. He was not permitted to remain long undisturbed, as a clerk entered almost immediately and announced a visitor. "Let him come right in," he promptly directed, once more the brisk man of business.

"Good morning, Mister Bill—glad to see you, young man," was his hearty salutation, giving his visitor a cordial hand-clasp. "I have been studying your telegram and speculating upon the nature of this important business. I believe I have even permitted myself to indulge the hope that it may relate in some way to that old proposition

of mine—which is still open, if you care to accept it," he added, regarding his visitor questioningly.

"There are several holes in the ground down there in New Mexico that require my most devoted attention for the present, Mr. Goddard."

"I imagined as much. We have heard considerable about that surprise you sprung on the old Consolidated crowd, as well as your recent set-to with the Hillman combination. They are an unscrupulous lot," he declared, shaking his head, "You served them well."

"The real struggle is to come—we have staked all on this final effort to free ourselves from our tormentors."

"Opinions seem to differ as to the outcome of this fight with your old enemy. Some incline to believe that it was part of the game to allow you to secure possession of the mines in order to create a little excitement and at the proper time draw the public into a fight to regain control of the Properties—merely another way of playing the same old game. Others think you capable of taking care of yourself, and incidentally, of the crowd of sharps with which you have to deal."

"And you, sir?" queried the young man, the slightest suggestion of a smile hovering about the corners of his mouth.

"I am free to confess, young man, that I am not wasting any of my sympathy on you," declared Mr. Goddard, with an assumption of indifference. "Nevertheless, we are all quite curious to know how you expect to restore public confidence in your mines, and at the same time hold the old crowd at bay."

"By the simplest and most direct means at my command, Mr. Goddard," promptly replied the young man.

"I shall fight them at their own game; on their own grounds—to a finish. I shall restore public confidence in the Properties by running them on business principles, and giving each man a fair and square run for his money."

"Spoken like the man that you are, Mister Bill," impulsively exclaimed Mr. Goddard, bringing his hand down on the broad shoulder of the other with forcible approval. "That's the spirit, young man, that cannot fail to succeed—your fight is already half won."

"Thank you, sir, I am glad to have your approval," said the younger man, with simple frankness. "This is practically a single-handed fight on my side, and a pat on the back from the right source carries the weight of a sledge hammer."

"I see there is little hope of your considering my proposition," said Mr. Goddard, regarding his visitor with thoughtful interest. "I have been at a loss to understand your persistent refusal to even seriously consider this position—a position I believe I am not overestimating in saying, would be regarded by the average young man as the opportunity of his life."

"I believe it to be quite all you say, sir."

"I wish to be relieved of the immediate care and responsibility of my rather extensive mining interests—there are too many diversified claims upon my time. Moreover, I realize my limitations. I am not so robust as I was some years back, and I want a vigorous, capable, honest young man to take the field in my place, and to assume the active management of my outside interests. The position is not a difficult one to fill; in fact, the place is ready-made, and a man has but to step into it and keep the wheels in motion. The heavier respon-

sibilities devolve upon me, and he has but to work under my supervision. Certainly, young man, you do not think me a hard and disagreeable task-master?" he inquired, with a kindly smile.

"Believe me, sir, I thoroughly appreciate the honor you do me—"

"Yes! yes!" interposed Mr. Goddard, "I know all about that. We will assume that the honor I would confer upon you is great. We will also assume that your very profound appreciation of that honor prompts you to throw it unhesitatingly over your shoulder. What then?"

"To be perfectly frank, Mr. Goddard, I don't think that I am especially well fitted for this particular position. There are plenty of capable young fellows possessing the qualifications you mention—plenty, I dare say, who would consider it the opportunity of their lives to step into a ready-made position."

"I see! I see! A light begins to dawn upon me. And so, young man," he said, looking severely over the tops of his glasses, "you will have none of my ready-made position; you will fight your own battles; you will make or break by your own unaided efforts. Am I right?"

"You have hit the nail just about on the head, sir. I enjoy the work, the excitement of the struggle, and best of all, the satisfaction that comes with success fairly won. I don't mind an occasional set-back, and even a fair and square knock-down is not without its compensating features. This life is a great problem, but if it means anything, it means that each man must make his own fight, and develop the best that is in him by an honest struggle with the very difficulties that so many of

us seek to avoid. I may be wrong sir. That is only my conception of the great scheme, but it's a poor builder who lacks the courage of his convictions, and refuses to work out the plans of his architect according to his best understanding."

"There is food for reflection in what you say, Mister Bill, even for an old man. I have nothing more to say except that I heartily commend your spirit—would that more possessed it in common," he added under his breath. "But what of this important business, young man? What would you have of me?"

"I would have," replied the young man, appropriating a small figuring tablet, and drawing with careful deliberation the figure five, to which he annexed with equal care several well-defined circles, "I would have," he repeated, as he prefixed the sign of dollars, "a call on that amount for say sixty days," pushing the tablet along the desk in front of the other, "not a cent less," he added, very positively, looking the elder man straight in the eye.

"Your greatest detractors would never accuse you of littleness of thought or conception, Mister Bill," said the banker, regarding the young man with an amused twinkle in his eyes, after a prolonged scrutiny of the figures.

"Men think according to their natures—the ground hog is not equipped for the flight of the pigeon."

"All right, Mister Bill, we will see what can be done. When do you leave?"

"To-night—"

"Oh, Dad! I have been waiting ever so long for you to finish with Mister Bill. The wheels of commerce must

stop for a few minutes," interrupted a laughing voice, as a young woman ushered herself into the office. "How are you, Mister Bill?" she briskly inquired, extending a prettily gloved hand. "I saw you enter the bank as I was driving by. I suppose you are aware, sir, that you are in my bad books—I really should not deign to notice you. But that's my forgiving nature—it is a downright misfortune to have so little control over oneself," she declared with great good humor.

"Beware, Mister Bill, how you trespass upon this young woman's good nature. You see how terrible is her displeasure," warned the father.

"Dear old dad speaks from sad experience," she laughed, seating herself on the arm of his great easy chair. "He is not free from me even in business hours. I am sure, dad, you have talked with Mister Bill quite long enough; you surely cannot have anything more to say to him."

"Mister Bill has important business, my dear, and he may not be able to give you much of his time—"

"Sir!" she indignantly exclaimed. "Business should never be permitted to interfere with the desires of a young woman. We have been hearing all sorts of strange and wonderful things about you, Mister Bill, and I shall want to know all about them from your own lips. Please go on and finish your business, dad, because I want to carry him off with me."

"Better go along with her, Mister Bill—you will have no peace until you do. Business can be deferred, but not the wishes of this young woman," said Mr. Goddard. "She has a stable full of all kinds of wild and untamed beasts, two or three new rigs, and I don't know what not.

She won't be satisfied until you have seen the whole circus."

"Dad knows," she laughed, her eyes sparkling with merriment; "Dad knows to his sorrow. Your coming is most opportune, Mister Bill. Any number of things are going on, and I am hardly on speaking terms with a man of my acquaintance; you are a friend in need. I'll promise you that not a minute shall hang heavily on your hands for a week at least. He simply cannot get away from us, can he dad?"

"I don't know, my dear. You must make your own arrangements with Mister Bill; he is the one man who pays no attention to your old dad. He has a will of his own. Beware of him, my dear," said Mr. Goddard, with a kindly glance at the young man.

"Just watch me, dad—watch the magical effect of gentleness upon a stubborn will," she laughed.

"If you have any pity on an old man, Mister Bill, you will help him to a chance to catch his breath. I am getting rather stiff in the joints to keep up the mad pace this young woman sets for me; she needs a younger running mate to keep pace with her—"

"Leave Mister Bill to me, dad," she laughingly interposed, placing a tiny finger on dad's lips, "and please go on and finish your business as quickly as possible while I wait outside. And mind," shaking a warning finger at the men, "no long stories," with which parting admonition she took her leave.

"She is all that is left me, Mister Bill; she is the only ray of sunshine in my life," said Mr. Goddard, with fatherly pride and gentleness, when the two men were alone. "We have become boon companions; we understand each

other thoroughly. Somehow she seems to care more for her old dad than for any of the young fellows. Don't take her long to size a man up, and when she discovers his weakness, she has little use for him. She goes with me on all my trips to the mines, and she knows more than half the experts; she is of more real value to me than any man I have. She seems to know intuitively a good many things that the rest of us have to work out, and some never do seem to comprehend. If she were a boy, sir, instead of the sunshine of her old dad's heart, he would not have to look far for the man to relieve him of his cares and responsibilities—not far, young man."

"Now, then, I guess we understand each other, Mister Bill," said Mr. Goddard, a few minutes later, rising from his chair, "and I wish you success. Now go out and find that young woman who has designs upon you, before she accuses her old dad of holding you against your will."

CHAPTER IX

WOMAN'S INTUITION

"WELL?" queried the young woman of her companion, pulling up her thoroughbred with startling abruptness, as they emerged into the open country beyond the city, and permitting the animal to indulge a more moderate pace. "Well?" she peremptorily repeated, her mood evidently having undergone a decided change during the brisk dash through the town.

"You drive exceedingly well, even if a trifle recklessly, if you will accept so doubtful a compliment."

"Nonsense!" she impatiently exclaimed. "I have brought you out here because I wished to talk to you seriously. You did not accept dad's offer?"

"No."

"You did well. Had you done so I should have had you ignominiously discharged at the very first opportunity. I am a walking delegate of no mean power in this particular family, I would have you know."

"Which power you would use unscrupulously?"

"If need be, yes. You relieved me of a disagreeable duty, and did not disappoint me."

"I fear I am more fortunate than worthy."

"Frankly, I think you not less one than the other. You did not disappoint me because I know you."

"Equally frankly, I believe I have never seriously considered the proposition your father made me."

"Certainly not—there was no need. You took the only course open to you. Had you succumbed to dad's flattering inducements—had you even hesitated—I should have been disappointed in you."

"With the result?" he questioned, quietly amused at the earnestness of his companion.

"You would have relegated yourself to the commonplace; simply exchanged your individuality for the pecuniary advantages of greater or less value which dad had to offer. I expect—I could almost say I *demand*—better things of you," she declared, almost defiantly.

"Demand?"

"Yes, demand," she repeated, with even greater emphasis," in the name of countless helpless creatures of your sex and mine. Such men as you are created for a purpose; you have a well defined work to accomplish; a great office to minister to your fellows, and you must not—you dare not—fail in your duty."

"You would have me right the wrongs of the downtrodden of my kind?"

"Yes, so far as lies in your power. The influence of one strong man striving for the welfare of his fellows is a far-reaching power for good—a moral strength that prevails against greater numbers—and he who possesses it has no right to withhold it."

"And this is my power—my work?"

"Most assuredly. Don't smile," she protested, with great seriousness. "It is true; you know it not less than I; you need no interpreter; you know it in the very consciousness of your strength—the very strength that

left you no alternative but to refuse dad's offer."

"This affair of the present?" she questioned, after an interval of silence, regarding him intently. "You will win in the end?"

"Yes."

"I have not considered the possibility of your failure. A grave responsibility rests upon you—greater perhaps, than you are aware, and you must win. Not for your sake or mine, but because it is right that you should."

"I believe that element, at least, is arrayed on my side."

"It is not right that such shameful methods, such unscrupulous men should succeed—they *must* not. Even now they are congratulating themselves on the success of their latest stratagem, as they are pleased to term it, and impatiently awaiting the time when they may take possession of the Properties and despoil you and your associates and hundreds of innocent stockholders of their rights."

"I am well aware of their intentions—they have not been at any pains to conceal them."

"Oh, no!" she laughed, coldly cynical, in answer to his smile of amused inquiry, "I am kept particularly well informed. I believe that nothing of importance relative to your financial dissolution has been allowed to escape me."

"My obituary seems to have preceded me."

"Which does not seem to cause you any great concern," she replied, regarding him curiously.

"No. I read between the lines—the real obituary lies there. Your father has also been kept in touch with the progress of events, I presume?"

"Oh, yes! Dad has been equally well informed, but for some reason not quite clear to me he seems to derive considerable quiet amusement from the general situation. Have you been able to discover any considerable vein of humor in the mass of complexities in which you are involved?" she demanded, giving him a searching glance.

"No. Yet it may exist. Your father is a man of more than ordinary discernment."

"So it would seem," she said, with considerable spirit, apparently not entirely satisfied with his reply. "Dad says that those with whom you have had to deal up to the present time are only the cat's-paw, and when you uncover the real enemy you will discover some pretty big guns—too big to be openly identified with the dirty work they have been engaged in."

"Yes, without a doubt the real power is vested in a coterie of New York financiers who, for obvious reasons, could not afford to lend their names to such disreputable methods as have been employed, even though they were entirely willing to share the spoils. Who they are, I have no means of knowing at this distance, as they have kept well under cover."

"What do you intend to do—how do you expect to reach them?" she inquired, with considerable interest.

"I shall drive them into the open and compel them to fight under their true colors—man to man—and then—"

"And then?" she repeated, as he paused a moment.

"Then I hope I shall not disappoint you," he said, more seriously than he had yet spoken.

"You will not disappoint me even were you to fail in your first attempt" she quietly replied. "Failure does

not mean defeat to you; it only means another and a more determined effort to accomplish the task you have set for yourself—a greater satisfaction in your ultimate triumph."

"Beware lest your faith prove my undoing," he admonished.

"I would have you win no hollow victory," she protested. "I would have you fight to win. I would have your success an unqualified triumph over the corrupt and villainous practices of your opponents, that they and all the world might know that a man may be true to himself and still be accounted a successful man. Such a victory will be a blessing to all mankind—a great moral triumph that only men like you can win."

"I believe that is what makes the struggle really interesting—all that makes it really worth while," he was forced to admit.

"I wanted you to know that I understand—that I approve. Dad understands, but only in part. He thinks that you are ambitious to accomplish certain results in your own way, and does not look beyond the surface. Others will understand you even less. But you do not seek the applause of your fellows, and when you have satisfied yourself, you will have won a greater approval than any which the world has to offer."

"I have already received the first fruits of victory, in your confidence and approval—"

"And now," she laughed, cutting short his reply, "I shall cease probing into the privacy of your inner consciousness and take you home to luncheon and convince dad that I am not in a base conspiracy with the enemy to make way with you. I shall then consider myself re-

lieved of all responsibility and permit you to go your way."

That night he sent a brief but expressive message to his comrades at the mines, which read as follows:

"Stand pat—ammunition all right. Bill."

CHAPTER X

WHEN MEN ARE TEMPTED

IN a quiet corner of the café of an uptown hotel, in the great metropolis, two men were seated at a table. The elder man had little to say, although it was apparent that his occasional brief remarks were directing the trend of the conversation. His companion, a young man in the early twenties, was laboring under a great stress of mental emotion, and making but a feeble effort to partake of the food set before him.

"You don't know me, sir!" he suddenly cried, staring wildly and uncertainly at the other. "I have betrayed a trust! I—I am a—thief! What's that? Who dares say Jack Winston is a thief? Ah, yes, it is true—terribly true! I no longer know the sound of my own voice—my brain is numb. And you—you, sir, are not surprised?"

"No."

"I knew it! And why not, when one has only to look on my face and see every letter of the word burned into my very flesh."

"Your fevered brain is playing you strange pranks," said the elder man, with kindly compassion.

"Why do you permit me to remain here and contaminate the very air you breathe?" he desperately demanded. "Why don't you order me kicked into the street—or shall I take myself off, and save you the trouble?"

"No. You are going to tell me the cause of your distress—I brought you here for that purpose."

"But you—you, sir, are a stranger to me!" cried the youth, incredulously. "You cannot possibly be interested in me or my troubles. Why am I here? What have I said? What am I doing?" he cried, despairingly. "Oh, it is all a hideous nightmare! Will the awakening never come?"

"The awakening has already come to you, my boy; it is oblivion you sadly need. Your mental machinery is racing beyond your control—you have lost your balance, and must unburden your overwrought mind to restore the equilibrium. Now, then," he said, his kindly voice vibrating the assurance of his sincerity, "what is it all about?"

"Ah, sir, it is the same old story," said the poor fellow, with hesitating and painful reluctance, "you can read it in the paper by your side; it was the same yesterday—it will be the same to-morrow. I thought I could make money quickly. Men all about me made hundreds and thousands in a day—an hour—why not I? Oh! it makes me sick at heart to tell this same old story you know so well. I helped them make their money—handled it for them—was enveloped in the very atmosphere of excitement and success. I breathed it, and became intoxicated. Yes, I would take a hand in the game—just a small hand. I would be satisfied with a little where others reached out for thousands. For a few days all went well. I could see visions of the happy home I had planned and dreamed of growing nearer and brighter. A little more risk, and a short cut across the years of monotonous toil before me—nothing venture, nothing have.

Ah, sir! those words that have stilled for the moment the small protesting voice within. Only a thousand—but one of the many thousands lying idle, and no harm to use for a day or two. The market took a sudden turn, and the great wave that had been carrying all before it to success and riches, suddenly faltered, turned, and began to recede. But it would return immediately—surely, surely, it must come back. Another thousand to protect the first—another, to save the two. You, sir, know the rest. The tide never turned, and before I could release myself from its grasp four thousand dollars had been swept away. Not a large sum, to be sure, but not a penny of it was mine, and it might as well be ten times the amount—I am powerless to make it good. The loss may be discovered at any moment, and I—I—but you must be weary of me and my wretched story."

"Novelty is rarely a conspicuous feature of wretchedness. Who suffers with you?"

"Oh, sir! if I alone could suffer the consequences of my folly. The thought that beats on my brain with every heart throb and vibrates through my whole being, is the shame and anguish that I have brought upon those dear to me. In spite of my boasted strength and the example so often before me; in spite of the duty I owed my dear old mother, and her faithful teachings—God knows she taught me well and true, and her heart would break if she knew that I had even been tempted; and my sister, who believes the heavens would fall before her brother could forget his honor; and one—one to whom I owe more than life itself, and who would rather see me dead than dishonored; yet, in spite of all I am no better than the fellow of the streets who snatches a purse and sneaks

away. To-night I had been haunting the docks, wandering into low saloons, sailors' boarding-houses, and the dirty tenement districts on the water front. The places I loathe seemed to possess a strange fascination for me. I envied the drunken sailors; laughed at their brawls and curses, and cursed back at them. Why I was permitted to leave their vile haunts alive is more than I can understand. It was the irony of fate, for I should have welcomed a blow to quiet my throbbing brain, or a knife thrust to still my aching heart; but even that was denied me. I envied the little ragged urchins of the street, and would gladly have exchanged places with them. Even the meanest and slimiest things that crawled and slunk into their holes seemed better than I; they were at least true to their natures, while I had forfeited the right to mine, and all that made life worth the living. I had twice walked down the docks and looked into the black waters, but each time I saw three faces looking up at me out of the darkness below, and heard the same accusing voice calling me coward—coward—and I slowly retraced my steps. I think I was gradually losing my mind. The terrible throbbing in my head seemed to create strange fancies. Then I ran against you, for I took small heed of my steps. Your voice aroused me from my trance or stupor. That you were a detective was my first intelligible thought, and I think I felt rather a relief; but a second glance, your grip, and the people coming from the ferry, told me that you were a traveler. I was starting on with a mumbled apology for running you down, when you took me by the arm, and said that I seemed rather out of sorts and had better ride up town with you. I hesitated an instant, and then stepped into your cab and

—well, here I am, without any volition of my own, and simply doing your bidding. You have been good to me, sir; you have finished your dinner and I—I must be going. Good night, sir."

* * * * * * * * *

Standing before the long glass doors of a brilliantly-lighted living room, a young miss gazed steadfastly out into the night. Her left hand, with forefinger inserted in a book, rested on her hip, while the fingers of her right hand toyed impatiently with the long beaded chain hanging about her neck. Suddenly starting from her reverie, she glanced at a clock on the mantel industriously ticking the minutes away, and compared the hour with the little timepiece nestling in her belt. Evidently little satisfaction was derived from the comparison, as she glanced impatiently at the other occupants of the room, heaved a very large sigh for so little a girl, and again directed her attention outwards.

"No sign of them yet, my dear?" inquired the mother, looking up from her sewing. "They will soon be here, I am sure," she added, by way of encouragement to the impatient watcher.

"Oh, dear! Who first discovered that patience was a virtue—a man I'll wager," petulantly retorted the young miss.

"At all events, it *is* a virtue, my dear," said the mother, with gentle reproval.

"I have simply been counting the minutes since tea, and the hands just seem to creep around the face of that hateful little clock—and it's such a small face, too," she protested, contemplating the offending timepiece as if that particular dial might speed the minutes faster were

it better disposed. "And besides, they may not come after all—men are so very uncertain."

"Why, Edith, has your very brief experience with the world made you a cynic?" inquired the last occupant of the room, glancing up from her work with a smile of amused surprise.

"I must say I have my doubts sometimes, Maude. Somehow a girl seems forever going the opposite way to the rest of the world—it's positively dizzying."

"The world goes its way regardless of fine distinctions and womanly ideals, my dear," said Maude, a little more seriously," and when one of our ideals is shattered, we immediately set up another—it is a woman's prerogative."

"I am beginning to think that girls' ideals are awfully soap-bubbly things anyway. They just grow and grow until they seem to radiate all the colors of the rainbow, and when you think them quite perfect—zip! they burst before your very eyes. But they are rather nice while they last," she admitted, with evident reluctance.

"Have some of your fine bubbles burst, dear?" inquired Maude, with kindly interest.

"Indeed they have!" spiritedly replied the young miss, "and now I just naturally expect the—zip! I put all my bubbles into my diary—a record of men, if you please—their deeds and misdeeds," she explained quite seriously.

"You have reduced mankind to a system of ledger footings, and can tell the face value of the individual at sight?" inquired Maude.

"Indeed I can! Some boys—and men, too—seem to think they are making a great impression on a girl by promising all sorts of things; a sailing party, a drive, a

book, a box of candy, or a bunch of violets, and the thought never seems to occur to them that the girl may be silly enough to take them seriously. But you know yourself, Maude Spencer, that a girl never forgets. She just waits and waits, until each little violet becomes as large as a chrysanthemum, and when they don't come, and still don't come, they begin to grow smaller and smaller until they get to be mighty small, but not nearly so small as the man in her estimation. So now when a man or a boy fails to keep his promise, away he goes on to the black-list, and I don't recognize him—cut him dead —and he does not get a second chance to fool Edith Winston—not if she knows it."

"You are right, my dear," laughed Maude, "a girl does remember. Perhaps if she remembered and believed less she might be saved many disappointments," she added, more soberly.

"My dear," gently interposed the mother, "you must remember that you have a brother, and I am sure you would not wish to be disloyal to him."

"Dear old Jack, of course not! but he is a man, and all men leave a great deal to be desired according to my ideas," replied the young philosopher, with a sly glance at Maude.

"Where *did* the child get such ideas?" exclaimed Mrs. Winston. quite startled at this display of worldly wisdom. "I am sure, my dear, I have ever led you to believe that many men are good and noble, and to be the wife of such a man is as great a happiness as you are destined to know."

"Yes, mama, you have. Most girls are led to believe that men are very superior creatures, and to secure one for

a husband, the great desideratum—the grand finale of our lives," a demure bow and sweeping movement of the arm lending additional emphasis to the grandeur of the possibilities. "We must do this, because men like that sort of thing; we must not do that, because their lordships might object; we must consider their likes and dislikes, and make their will our law; in short, cease to exist only as our lives may bestow some greater benefaction upon our lords and masters. And when we say our prayers, we know not whether to ask first for our daily bread or—a husband."

"Edith, this is shameful!"

"Indeed it is, mama," replied this sad minx, knowing full well that she was misinterpreting the intent of her mother's protest, "and the result is," she continued, with profound assurance, "the men are placed on a pedestal and girls are graciously permitted to gather around and burn incense at the masculine shrine."

"I must confess to some enlightenment on this particular subject, my dear," said Mrs. Winston, regarding her daughter with scant approval.

"It is quite true, mama, and when the heads of the poor men have been sufficiently turned with the sense of their very great importance down they drop one after another and are finally carried away in triumph to the tune of——" and here the young miss seated herself at the piano and proceeded to bring forth, rather more energetically than artistically, the strains of a familiar wedding march.

"That will do, Edith!" peremptorily interposed Mrs. Winston, abruptly terminating this sacrilegious demonstration. "Your mother requires time to reflect upon the

very superior knowledge possessed by her daughter," and addressing Maude for the benefit of the arch conspirator, who was silenced, if not subdued, said: "It is extremely embarrassing, not to say humiliating, to suddenly discover that one is not keeping pace with one's daughter in worldly matters. Verily the blind lead the blind."

Not many minutes elapsed, however, before the thoughts of the young miss again found audible expression. "Just the same, I don't think that Jack has behaved very well. He has not been home for three weeks and I think he might have come sooner."

"You must remember, my dear, that your brother is now a man with duties and responsibilities which demand his first consideration. Business is a severe taskmaster, and I am sure he is coming home at the very first opportunity his duties permit. Besides," her eyes resting tenderly upon Maude, "we know the very great incentive he now has to put forth his very best efforts—the highest and noblest in a man's life—to make a home for the woman he loves, and win an honorable place among men that she may be proud of her husband. And when Jack is compelled to be away from those he loves to accomplish all this, we must help him to be brave, and not add our little worries to his. I am sure he will succeed, and you, my dear, are as anxious to assist him, and will be as proud of his success as any of us."

"Of course I am, and of course I will!" exclaimed true blue little sister. "Jack is just the dearest and best brother in the whole world and Maude is the luckiest girl to get him, she had better know, and I am jealous—very jealous indeed." And to show how very terribly the green-eyed monster possessed her dear little self, she

leaned over the back of Maude's chair, and laying her fresh young face against the conscious flushes of Jack's affianced wife, informed her that she would heaps rather have her for a sister than any girl she ever knew, which declaration of peace and good will was duly ratified and sealed according to prescribed feminine form.

"Yes," gasped Maude, when she had been released from the suffocating embrace of the young impulsive, "I know that I am a very lucky girl, for there is not a truer or a better man in the world than Jack. He is working so hard to make a home and position in the world, I sometimes feel that I am not worthy of such untiring and unselfish devotion. He tells me his plans and his ambitions—Oh, they are so glowing!—and he is so happy and light-hearted. And then when everything seems to go wrong, and he becomes just a little discouraged, I do so long for the time when I can help him to bear his disappointments."

And the mother's voice was tender, and her eyes were dim, as she folded the younger woman in her arms, and declared that her boy had chosen well—that she would not have had it otherwise had the choice been with her. And then Maude pressed a kiss upon the dear old lips of Jack's mother, and told her how happy she was; how she had feared at times—just the tiniest bit, you know—that his mother might not approve; that she might have other hopes and plans for her boy, and she was almost afraid to say yes, when Jack had asked her to be his wife. Thereupon the mother protested with great seriousness, that her fondest hopes had been that her boy would choose a good and true woman for his helpmate regardless of wealth and station, as she did not believe that riches

or position made happiness. That the best riches a young couple could possess were love and confidence in each other, and with good health they would soon gather worldly goods and find happiness in so doing; for in her poor opinion, real happiness was to be found, not alone in having achieved a desired position, but in the effort of achieving—at least that had been the experience of Jack's father and mother.

"I have done my duty by my boy as I have seen it, and when he was left without a father's care and guidance, I felt that a greater responsibility rested upon me. I have taught him to be truthful and honest, and to hold himself above the petty meannesses of smaller natures; I have impressed upon him the respect and consideration due our sex. I have tried to mould his character so that it might be invulnerable to the shafts of temptation for which his youth and inexperience would be a shining mark. Yet, when he went out into the world, and into the great city, I feared for his strength, feared lest there might be some weak spot that my ignorance of the world had not properly protected, and there is never a night but I pray that God may give him strength to resist temptation, and to remain good and unsullied from the contact with his fellows. I felt that an added strength and a greater incentive to be true to himself had been given him, and that another class of temptation had been removed from his path, when you became a part of his life, his hopes, and his ambitions, my dear. No one knows the feelings of a mother—none but a mother can know—that waking or sleeping but one image is in her thoughts, and her whole life radiates around that one dear form. But I have done my best, my dear, and I cannot think that after all my

care and teachings—no, I will not believe—that my boy can so far forget the duty he owes himself, his mother, his sister, and now his affianced wife, as to be untrue to his manhood. But if that should ever happen, it will not be because he has not been forewarned and forearmed, but because, after all, he is only my boy, and but a man who overestimated his strength, only to find himself weak, and the current strong." And here the good woman suddenly recalled that she was dwelling too long and too gloomily upon the subject nearest her heart, and, smiling upon her interested listener, declared that she was borrowing needless trouble, for did they not know that their Jack would never fail them! Ah, no—her king could do no wrong!

It was ever so—may it ever be. This gentle and kindly soul with whitening locks and wrinkled brow, looking back over years weighing heavily against the allotted span; this fresh young soul, buoyant and hopeful of the life to come—the dawning light and the setting sun.

From cradle to grave—in sickness and in health—in adversity and in prosperity—in joy and in sorrow—the gentle spirit of woman watches over the destiny of man, asking no greater boon than to applaud his successes, laugh when he is gay, cheer him in misfortune, or cool his fevered brow. Ah! gentle soul, you *are* the better half of man—the inspiration of his better deeds—the incentive to greater and higher aspirations; and even the crowns of kings or laurel wreaths of heroes shed no brighter lustre than the love with which you crown *your* king.

CHAPTER XI

THOSE WHO WATCH AND WAIT

"I AM very much interested in Mr. Waldron," declared the little maid, who had maintained a discreet silence during this very serious conversation, but not for an instant relinquishing her watchfulness.

"Really? And how long has this serious state of affairs existed?" inquired Maude.

"Ever since Jack began to write about him. You are interested in Jack, I may be interested in Mr. Waldron, may I not?"

"To be sure, my dear," laughed Maude. "We are all very much interested in Mr. Waldron—we have quite given him a place in the family circle. You will share him with us just the littlest mite, will you not?"

"Well, anyway, I am very curious and—impatient," she truthfully added.

"Perhaps, after all, you may be disappointed—"

"Subject to acceptance only on approval—returnable if not entirely satisfactory," interposed the young miss.

"I hope Jack is not mistaken in the man," said Mrs. Winston, with a mother's concern for the associates of her boy. "Jack is sometimes over enthusiastic concerning his friends, and an older man generally possesses considerable influence over a younger man for good or ill."

"I hope he does not smoke cigarettes, and has a mustache, and is big and strong, and is not a—bubble," interjected the irrepressible.

"Why, Edith! Why *do* you say such things?" remonstrated her mother.

"Well, mama, I just can't stand this suspense any longer—I just have to say things!"

For a moment her impatience gave way to curiosity, and she wondered where Jack had met this new friend, and why he was bringing a comparative stranger down to their quiet country home. "Because," she explained, "Jack says he is from the West—plains and mountains and that sort of thing—and at best he must be a species of cowboy—a diamond in the rough, perhaps," as her brother was wont to designate some of his friends. On second thought, such a possibility was regarded with rather more favor. He could surely tell her no end of stories—very real stories—but her chatter was brought to a sudden termination, and with a cry of "Here they are!" she dashed out into the darkness, fortunately for her ladyship, taking the precaution of opening the glass doors before passing through. Presently she came trooping back, one arm around her brother, the other carrying his grip, his hat perched on the back of her own little head, laughing and talking in the same breath—she had got her Jack.

The young man greeted his mother and sweetheart as became a dutiful son and devoted lover, and then proceeded to introduce the stranger, who had followed leisurely after. He would relieve the introduction of all formality—would Jack—and declared his mother to be the dearest and best of mothers; and Maude, the sweetest

of sweethearts; and catching Edith in his arms, gave her a resounding smack, and assured the stranger that she was the darlingest sister a fellow ever had, which seemed not to surprise or embarrass that young lady in the least.

Mrs. Winston greeted the stranger with cordial handclasp and assurance of welcome, which he modestly acknowledged. With blushes suffusing her fair face, and a mien not entirely free from embarrassment—maidenly modesty not being in full accord with Jack's extravagant informality—Maude graciously added her welcome. "You must pardon Jack's enthusiasm," she said, with a smile reflecting the cordiality of her greeting, "and believe that the welcome of his little home circle is quite as sincere as are his superlatives."

Warm welcome indeed, for Jack was nothing if not sincere in his expressions of love for those near and dear to him. Still retaining the little hand in his strong muscular grasp, and looking down into eyes reflecting the sincerity of the words just uttered, "Superlatives give adequate expression only, upon occasion—Jack chooses well," he said. It was not flattery nor form of speech. Each knew that the other was merely honest; each recognized in the other the innate qualities of manhood and womanhood speaking as plainly one to the other as the simple words of greeting. Lucky fellow to call this man friend—twice lucky to win this woman's love.

The youngest member had withdrawn somewhat apart from the group, where she calmly contemplated the formalities of greeting, and the stranger in particular. To be sure, the first step was to look the guest over carefully and discover his possibilities; or, if he were quite impossible, why, very well, this young woman would

promptly wash her small hands of all responsibility of whatsoever kind or character. Jack brought him down and Jack may entertain him—so there! The first impression seemed not entirely favorable to the stranger, all unconscious of the ordeal through which he was passing, and a look of disappointment might have been discerned on the young face. He was not a cow-boy, or even distantly related to one—that was easily apparent; but just a plain every-day man. No novelty in that—pooh! And yet, was she quite sure? The little miss was a keen observer, and something about the man who had so unassumingly, yet with a certain dignity and self-possession taken his place in the little family circle, told her that this was a type of man new to her, and after all, even if he were not a wild and woolly Westerner, he might possess possibilities. Perhaps he could do things—Oh, very great things! She simply adored a strong man who was master of himself and of men—did this little woman—in which respect she was one with the great feminine heart.

Jack was quick to note the very profound attention with which his sister regarded the stranger, and rightly surmised the general trend of her thoughts. "Well, Sis, I am sure that Mr. Waldron would be very much embarrassed were he aware of the very particular attention being paid him by a certain young lady," he told her, rudely interrupting very serious meditations.

If brother had thought to embarrass little sister, the tables were likely to be well turned upon him. Without the slightest hestitation or suggestion of confusion—rather apologetically, if you please—she replied, "Well, I believe I was just a little disappointed at first, because I expected to meet a real and truly Westerner. But on

the whole I rather prefer Mr. Waldron just as he is, and I hope we shall be very good friends." And suiting her action to her words, she proceeded to take the initiative, perhaps as a gentle guarantee of good faith, and with a mien of quiet self-possession, advanced to where that gentleman was sitting, and explained that she would shake hands again, if he pleased, as it appeared there had been a misunderstanding. And that gentleman, nothing loath, rose very soberly, took the little hand in his, and expressed great satisfaction on his part.

The gentlemen properly welcomed, the young ladies suddenly bethought themselves of a promise to look in at "a little informal," near by, and insisting that they did not require escort, nor need the gentlemen call for them, as they should return with Mrs. Davidge, "Who, by the way, Jack, is paying us a visit," explained sister, and promising not to be long, "Just to look in," from Maude, disappeared with swish of skirts and laughing voices. Mrs. Winston also retired almost immediately, leaving the men temporarily to their own devices.

CHAPTER XII

A YELLOW STREAK?

JACK watched the dear old form of his mother as she passed from the room, and for a moment stood gazing blankly at the door which hid her from his sight. Suddenly, with a moan, as if stricken by a leaden missile, he sank into a chair, and bowing his head covered his face with his hands; his frame, convulsed with the tumult of emotion, seemed to slowly shrink within itself. For a moment he seemed to have lost complete control of himself, but by a strong effort he pulled himself together, and looking up at his friend, his voice trembling with emotion, "Forgive me, old fellow," he cried, "I did not intend to give way in this manner, but the meaning of the whole thing seemed suddenly to fall upon me with crushing weight, and it simply took me off my feet."

Truly one could not look upon that face without pity, for only suffering, nay, only the anguish of a tortured soul, could leave such marks upon the flesh. The quick eye of the mother had long since discovered that something was amiss with her boy, which even his forced gayety could not veil from her sight. "'Tis nothing—nothing, indeed—but a little overwork that a day or two at home will set right," and sweetheart tells sister, "Jack is working too hard—it's a shame—indeed, it is!"

"Never mind, old chap," said the elder man, encouragingly, "I understand your feelings, and am not surprised that you threw up your hands for the moment. But you must brace up. It is all over now, and you are going to begin anew and make a clean sheet this time," and slightly raising the young fellow's head, and looking into his eyes, "Isn't that right?" he asked, with a kindly smile.

"Yes, yes! God knows I am going to begin anew, and with his help I shall make a clean sheet this time, for if I were to live a thousand years I could never forget the torture I have endured. But when I think how near I came to sacrificing everything on earth dear to me, and was saved only by a miracle—a miracle, do you understand?—I tremble from sheer weakness. And they say that the days of miracles are past. Good friend!" he cried, impulsively grasping the other by the hand, "to you I owe everything that I possess, or ever can possess; but for you I should be even now in a felon's cell, disgraced and despised by the world, and an object of pity and shame to those whose lives I had ruined. Oh, it drives me mad to think of it!"

"Don't think of it. Think of the good resolves you have made—and live them."

"You have never told me why you did all this for me," said Jack, with some hesitation. "You promised to tell me some time. You must not think me impatient. I know you will tell me when you feel inclined, and all in good time. Besides," smiling wanly, "you have never lectured me, and I am prepared to take that also when it suits your pleasure."

Once—twice—thrice—the elder man paced slowly back

and forth across the room before being moved to speech. "You are right, Jack," he finally said, "I did promise you an explanation—it is your due; and as well now as another time, I dare say. This miracle, as you are pleased to term it, is really a very simple matter."

Taking another turn across the room, and then carelessly, as if the matter were hardly worthy of serious consideration, or perhaps to change the current of the young fellow's thoughts, he continued: "You know me as from the West—yet I am not Western born. Something less than half my life has been cast in the wild and sparsely settled sections of the West, with companions no less rough than the country itself. It is a hard fight at best. Old Dame Fortune and Miss-Fortune wage a never ending struggle for supremacy. Rich to-day perhaps, and away to the bad to-morrow without a moment's warning. But it is all a part of the life, and you pick yourself up, pull yourself together, and go at it again. I have looked starvation in the face, and had the gaunt old spectre for company much too long upon several occasions, and the regulation misfortunes have fallen to me without particular partiality, I think I may say without undue exaggeration. With these same misfortunes and privations comes a more generous and magnanimous feeling for our fellows, and when we see a poor chap in hard luck or in distress, we give him a lift. A man never knows how soon the positions may be reversed, but he *does* know that the best and surest way to deserve a good turn himself, is to treat the other fellow just about as he would like to be treated under similar circumstances. Simple sort of theory, yet after all, pretty good philosophy, and not a bad religion if

one is casting about for a creed—its simplicity recommends it. So, then, to those rough fellows of the plains and mountains, it becomes a part of their better natures to offer a lift or a life, if necessity demands, and one is not more freely offered than the other.

"How did I come to give you a lift? I will tell you. This unfortunate experience, new to you, is an old story to me. Too many times have I seen men, young and old, come into mining-camps and the frontier towns, stake and lose their money. Perhaps the wages of a season or two, carefully hoarded for some particular purpose; proceeds from the sale of a mine—the results of months and perhaps years of labor, suffering and privation; a drove of cattle, one thing or another, it matters not. It is bad enough if a man has gambled away his own money, but the poor devil deprived of even this solace is miserable indeed. After that point is reached, they are much the same, differing only in minor details. The night I saw you at the docks, I recognized your condition at a glance. Your white face, haggard and drawn, the unnatural glitter in your eyes, told me the story as plainly as words. I said to myself, this young fellow is a hard loser, and needs looking after. You ran into me because I stood in your way, and permitted you to butt up against me. When you had finished your story, the whole thing seemed perfectly clear to me. I saw the happiness—the lives—of four people balanced against four thousand dollars. A thousand dollars a life! It seemed too great a sacrifice. Lives are worth more than a thousand dollars—such lives as I felt sure were at stake in this instance. I was satisfied that you had told me the truth, at least I was willing to gamble a little

myself on the general proposition, and merely, as a small precaution, to feel that I was at least getting a run for my money, wished to assure myself that you were in the employ of the brokerage firm you mentioned, and that I easily ascertained next day."

"Ah! good friend, it is all very simple, and yet—yet I am unable to grasp the full significance of your generous deed," cried the young man, tears rolling down his pale face.

"I could not well have done less under the circumstances. I am something of a coward. Most of us have a yellow streak in our make-up and I am no exception. I would not dare—fact, I literally would not dare—to have in my keeping the power to save four lives, or what I am pleased to consider their equivalent, and withhold that power merely for the sake of a few paltry dollars that I had dug from the earth. I should fully expect, sooner or later, in one way or another, to pay even a greater price for my cowardice. Now you know it all. I shall not lecture you, as I believe you have suffered sufficiently to teach you a lesson for all time. If not, no words of mine will impress you. I intend to keep you in sight, and the settlement I finally make with you will depend much upon yourself."

That the young man was at first deeply interested in the explanation that seemed to involve such an air of mystery, was plainly apparent. That his interest quickly developed into a distinct admiration for the man speaking so carelessly and indifferently of his life, and the motives which actuated him, was no less apparent. Here was a process of reasoning and a type of man new to him. Here was a man who showed him the littleness and nar-

rowness of his own life. Here was a man who had struggled—had been beaten, but not cowed; a man who had suffered want and privation, adversity and temptation; who had faced death in many forms; yet this man had come through the fire not only unscathed, but strengthened and made better for the lessons he had learned from his rough and bitter experiences. Here was a good example to follow—a superb specimen of manhood to mould his own life after so far as it lay in his power.

"As I have thanked you before, I thank you again, and you shall never have cause to think me careless or ungrateful for what you have done for me," he earnestly declared. "You will forgive me," he said, hesitatingly, "but you—you could afford to do all this?"

"I have not inconvenienced myself. I will, however, offer you one suggestion. You have suffered—suffered deeply. Remember this, when you meet any of your fellows in distress—man or woman—do not refuse them at least a little assistance. Go out of your way to do a good turn. Give according to your means. Even a cup of coffee will sometimes put new life into a discouraged stomach, and you can never tell when even a kind word will make the world seem brighter and perhaps give new hope to a weary soul. You can always afford both, and the good you are able to do for others will help you to forget your own troubles, and expiate the wrong you have done. Try it."

CHAPTER XIII

THE WOMAN

"BY the way," Waldron quickly remarked, doubtless to divert the conversation to lighter ways, "your sister mentioned a guest."

"Yes, Mrs. Davidge," said Jack. "She is the daughter of an old friend of my mother's. We are all very fond of her, and she runs down from the city for a day or two whenever she feels inclined, knowing that she is always welcome. I don't know," this uncertain declaration being accompanied by a shake of the head, and a smile not too jovial, "but I have been the unconscious means of bringing you into the presence of your fate. Fact is, Mrs. Davidge is a widow, of say, seven and twenty, rich and charming. Mark me well, and beware! But that is not all," he added, glancing critically at his guest to note the effect of this possibly startling information.

"What else? I may as well know the worst at once."

"Well, nature has been very kind to her in many respects—positively lavish in others. To be sure, she possesses only the fashionable requirements in the way of features—she is nothing if not correct, you must know. But her eyes! Ah, old chap, I verily believe she was designed by her Creator as a punishment to our sex. Eyes without intellect—champagne without fizz. But she has

intellect—well developed, if you please. She possesses the faculty of bringing aboriginal traits into evidence to an alarming degree—she simply makes monkeys of men. Are you interested?" he inquired, somewhat doubtfully.

"Oh, exceedingly!" replied the guest, glancing over a book he had taken from the table. "Is there more to be said?"

"Much, my dear fellow, much—the limit is my incapacity. I am not well versed in the classics of beauty, but she is in the blue ribbon class with lengths to spare. She is a New Yorker in all the term implies. Is your curiosity aroused, sir?"

"I am possessed by contending emotions," was the somewhat ambiguous reply of the other, as he tossed the book back on the table and possessed himself of a comfortable chair.

"She married very young. Parental affair—money involved, and that sort of thing, you know," continued Jack, evidently desirous that his friend should be well informed concerning his fair guest. "Her parents and old man Davidge were about the only ones who seemed to think well of the match, but as it was for them to give and to receive, the deal went through. I don't think she was very enthusiastic about the affair herself, if the truth were known, but she kept her thoughts to herself, at least she never confided in me. But the next time she starts she will have something to say about the weight she takes up, or I don't know her."

"You are still speaking of the young woman?"

"I guess they all realized when it was too late that she had been given the worst of the start," he continued, ignoring this rather questionable interruption, "and when

the old man discovered, as he must have done, that it was sheer nonsense to hitch up an old campaigner with a young filly just coming into her stride and expect them to keep an even pace, he showed that he was still a dead game sport by just quietly cashing in—died, you know—and left her all his money, and the house on the Avenue, where she and her mother still live. Rather handsome of the old fellow after all. His widow is certainly very popular, and none the less on account of the money he left her. She is the whole thing wherever she appears; always a crowd around her—admiration of the men and of course the envy of the women—if no worse.

"If you enter the running, old chap," he rattled on, no comment being offered by his auditor, "you will find a large field, but Mr. Chadeller is the man you will have to beat out—at least he will be most in the way. I suppose he is down here now—he will bring the girls home. He owns quite a little property hereabouts which requires considerable looking after—at times. He seems to be the most likely winner in sight, but I don't think much of his form—ugly performer, you know—liable to throw himself."

"Your appreciation of the gentleman is of a negative quality, I am compelled to infer," said Waldron.

"There is certainly not much love lost between us. He is insanely jealous, and resents any attention paid to Mrs. Davidge. Result, he has developed a state of chronic disagreeableness which at times amounts to downright insolence. I should have taken positive delight in thrashing him upon several occasions, but unfortunately my ability has not been equal to my desire by about forty pounds."

"The appreciation of your lack of avoirdupois would seem to be the conservative part of valor."

"I think she tires of the mad whirl at times and comes down here to get away from the crowd and enjoy a little rest and quiet," continued the young man, ignoring what he evidently regarded as a mild facetiousness at his expense. "During the summer she frequently prolongs her visits and then some of her more devoted satellites suddenly discover an attraction about the old town and send down their traps and put up at the hotel, or drop their hooks off the shore, and the whole crowd stands at attention. Her ability to manage men—and horses, too—is little less than marvelous. She drives them both—man and beast—with a high hand."

"Well, young man, after your very comprehensive dissertation and warning, I can hardly do less than to absolve you from all responsibility of whatsoever kind or character. All of which is extremely kind of you even if a trifle unfair to the lady," said the guest, rising from his chair. "All right, Jack! Forewarned is forearmed, and thanks to you I am a walking arsenal. Please order up the enemy!"

"Here they are!" exclaimed Jack. "I hear their voices outside. You had better get over by that table, old man," his spirits rising perceptibly; "you will need a bracer. She always comes with a rush—sweeps you right off your feet."

"We crawl into a hole in the ground out in my country when things of that sort appear on the horizon," said Waldron, apparently not impressed with the serious nature of the situation.

"Let me give you a few final injunctions," said Jack,

his eyes sparkling with merriment. "Her manner will be charmingly impulsive and effusive, and sufficiently personal to make you think rather well of yourself. She will perhaps tell you that she is delighted to add her welcome although this is not her home—only by adoption, you know. She should have been a politician; as a man she would have shaken her way into the presidential chair. The mere extending of the hand is a revelation in itself—graciousness, impulsiveness, and frankness, all concentrated into one pretty movement, ably seconded by a smile of seraphic sweetness. Yes, indeed, she has heard dear Maude, and dear Edith speak of you so many, many times. They have all been impatiently awaiting your coming, but men have so many calls upon their time what can they, poor things, expect? But you have come to them at last—you are from the West, aren't you? beware, unsuspecting mortal—the toils of that fate are being drawn about you. Really, she possesses a great admiration for men of the West—the coils are being drawn closer and closer—especially men of the plains and mountains—Ah, son of Adam, it is the same old story!—they are such brave, rugged, manly fellows, such perfect types of manhood, and—it's all over, poor fellow—those same eyes that I have warned you against have done their deadly work."

"What would this—this divine creature—say to hear herself so maligned?" Waldron protested.

"You may tell her at the first opportunity, with my compliments," replied the unabashed youth. "I am deeply indebted to her for past courtesies," he added, rather apologetically. "I should really like to see some estimable gentleman—like yourself, for instance—stand

up and give and take with her for a few rounds. She has had so many walkovers she is rather inclined to patronize our sex."

"Really, Jack, you are as difficult to follow as you are uncomplimentary, which is saying considerable. I refuse to hear the lady further maligned," declared the mild mannered man, with an assumption of seriousness, which in truth seemed not too deep.

"I can see Mr. Chadeller even now," persisted this young man terrible, "glaring at you and wanting to know who you are, where you came from, and your pedigree generally, before he permits you to enter the charmed circle of distinguished admirers of the fair Cathalee, of which he is the self-constituted head and censor. Oh, me!

"Here they come!" he cried, a moment later, eagerly grasping that fact to forestall a possible move of retaliation on the part of his long-suffering victim. "That's she!" he exclaimed, as the sound of a mirthful laugh came rippling into the room. "Those are her skirts!" he announced an instant later. "She will be in the lead—she is always first under the wire," he cried, his eyes snapping with suppressed merriment. "They're off!" was his final admonition, under his breath, as into the room swept the subject of his remarks.

CHAPTER XIV

AS MEN ARE MADE

CATHALEE DAVIDGE was a distinct type of American womanhood. In the world, and of it, possessing power over others of which she was not unconscious, yet not realizing the full measure of her control, nor whence it came. The great strength of her personality, which transcended all others, and beside which the little artificialities faded into insignificance, was her own innate goodness of heart, her depth and breadth of character, which rose above the sordid smallness of her surroundings, and compelled the recognition of weaker mentalities.

Hers was a happy disposition, seeking the pleasures and recreations which appealed most strongly to her robust and buoyant vitality, and giving her unstinted efforts to the work she had relegated to herself with equal energy and enthusiasm. Free from malicious gossip, preferring to think well rather than ill of any and all, and ever ready to stand by a friend through thick and thin, once satisfied that he or she was in the right. The very buoyancy of her nature would, of necessity, give that element of society which constitutes itself the detractors and censors of its fellows, golden opportunities for speeding its shafts of innuendo and malice, but the breath of scandal had never seared her fair name.

"Egad! It does my old heart good to see that girl sweep into a ball-room," vociferated old Major Rothford. "My word for it, she's just bubbling with life and spirit, and brings a freshness along with her that takes ten years off my old age to lay eyes on her. Natural as a flower, true as steel, and smart as a whip. Egad, sir, you can't beat her!" and the old major voiced the sentiments of the many.

It is true that the little archer had sped more than one dart with unerring aim, but each in the end had received the same answer when he stepped beyond the boundary line of friendship. She had nothing further to offer. No, there was no other. And if he went away and returned, thinking that the lapse of time might work a change, the answer was the same. So it was not strange that men, failing despite their repeated assaults to make any appreciable impression upon the impregnable wall of perfect self-control with which she seemed to fortify herself, also failed to understand the cause of their futile efforts, and were inclined to agree with the oft expressed belief, that in matters of the heart she was cold, if not impossible, never thinking that the secret might lie in the weakness of the besiegers, rather than in the unconquerable strength of the fortress.

"What was that remark, Jack—you rascal! Confess—you look positively guilty!" she declared, descending upon that luckless youth.

But why the start, barely perceptible, perhaps, on the part of the other occupant of the room? Well, indeed, suppose he did start? Men have doubtless started before, and perhaps even trembled when this same person came into their presence. Ah! the mystery deepens. Or

was it mere coincidence? As the lady turned to greet the gentleman, she suddenly started—hesitated—but for an instant, however, and the formalities of introduction were duly acknowledged.

As Jack had predicted, Mr. Chadeller had been the escort of the party, and was duly presented to Waldron. He was certainly not more than civil. Perhaps he looked upon the new-comer as another possible rival, and while no particular harm need be anticipated, no good could possibly result. All of which would indicate that he was a man of caution, and not confident unto rashness of his ability to ultimately carry off the prize on which he had set his hopes and his ambitions, and as much of his heart as he could disassociate from the process of money-letting and getting.

The conversation quickly became general, or more properly speaking, was monopolized by Mrs. Davidge, Edith and Jack, all seeming to talk at once, their running fire of badinage being directed for the most part upon the stranger. The first named opened civilities or hostilities —there might have been some doubt in Waldron's mind which term was applicable—much as Jack had predicted, which was really not surprising as they were channels into which the conversation might naturally drift. A man of Waldron's robust physique and the life he had led would naturally appeal to her own wholesome nature. He seemed inclined, however, to regard her pleasantries with mild suspicion. He had seen men of the West make tenderfeet dance to the music of shots fired at their feet; was he merely dancing to the music of this siren's flattery and badinage? He was a tenderfoot once upon a time, it was true, but that was long ago, and under conditions

that left no doubt as to the etiquette involved, which was promptly and cordially expressed through the medium of a "straight right" delivered with the artistic abandon of the trained athlete, bringing the festivities to an abrupt termination, and his would-be entertainer to the floor.

Such heroic measures were hardly applicable to present conditions, and the dance must be permitted to go merrily on with the best grace possible. So it was that while the charming creature (figuratively) talked rings around him, he merely (another figure) turned in his tracks and met her at whatever point of the circle she presented herself. She had doubtless soon discovered that her antagonist was not to be lightly rated—a fellow who persisted in choosing his ground, and the pace he would go, refusing absolutely to be drawn away from the stronghold of his self-possession, and avoiding ambushes like a seasoned veteran. In short, showing commendable adaptability to the requirements of the situation, and withal, conveying the impression of a reserved force should occasion require.

Mr. Chadeller's part in the conversation had been merely of a perfunctory character. That gentleman was palpably ill at ease. Matters were not progressing to his liking. His greeting to Jack had been none too gracious, which doubtless caused that young man to regretfully recall the disparity of forty pounds avoirdupois standing between him and simple civility. He viewed with little satisfaction the frank, good-natured greeting Mrs. Davidge bestowed upon the young man, nor did the unaccountable incident of the greeting with the stranger escape him. It was insignificant, to be sure—yet it boded no good. What was it anyhow? He was sus-

picious and uncomfortable—he was rarely otherwise. Moreover, he was ignored; certainly was not a necessary adjunct to the little party. To receive his sanction, or even toleration, his was the central figure around which a company must revolve. By some strange process of which nature alone holds the secret, he saw things from a converse standpoint to the majority of his fellows with the inevitable result that he gratified his own inordinate vanity, and bored the many.

His desire to shine in society through the medium of his intellect was doubtless owing to these same conflicting elements in his character. If his wit was small his purse was large, which secured for him a courteous tolerance in certain quarters; in others, varied forms of flattery—a kind of subsidized adulation—a tribute to his purse which deluded the man and demeaned his flatterers.

Even a gentle and enduring patience has its limitations, and as Mr. Chadeller was a stranger alike to one and the other, he could not be expected to long abide his present negative position, and the young man was therefore little surprised when the gentleman indicated that he would speak with him.

"Who is he?" he demanded, indicating the "he" by a movement of his head, when he had led the way a little apart from the others.

"The gentleman is Mr. William Waldron," replied the young man, none too amiably, doubtless irritated by the insolent abruptness of the demand as well as by the meddlesome spirit which prompted it.

On several occasions this same gentleman had attempted to exercise a censorship over the young man,

presuming not a little upon his long acquaintance with the family, and a certain interest he was not unwilling should be understood that he entertained for its general welfare. The real cause of his interest, however, might better be attributed to the extremely friendly relations of a certain fair lady with the family, and his present agitation was doubtless inspired more by the graciousness with which she was pleased to regard the stranger, than by his possible demoralizing influence upon the family circle.

"Waldron?" he repeated, with ill concealed displeasure, "I don't know any Waldrons. I—"

"It is sufficient for me to say, Mr. Chadeller, that the gentleman is my friend—a guest in my mother's house—a welcome guest—and you can hardly do less than to remember that you are also a guest if you would retain the same consideration," said the young man, with careful distinctness, looking his inquisitor squarely in the eye.

Surprise and indignation were plainly depicted upon Mr. Chadeller's countenance, as he grasped the full intent and meaning of the young man's reply. "You will be sorry for this, young man, before you are much older," he fumed, under his breath. "You will see the day when you will need the assistance of the friends you so glibly insult—but I wash my hands of you," and turning abruptly, he made a hurried adieu to Mrs. Davidge, conceded a nod to the young ladies, no notice whatever to Waldron, and passed out.

"What have you done, Jack?" cried Maude, not a little alarmed, as she was aware of the rather tense relations existing between the men, and had long feared

an open rupture, against which she had frequently warned Jack.

"I hope you have not been rude, Jack," Mrs. Davidge ventured, well knowing his impetuous disposition.

"Well, I didn't exactly turn the other cheek," he admitted. "I gave about as I received."

A feeling of constraint had fallen upon the little party. Maude should be returning home, which meant escort duty for Master Jack, and the young ladies hied themselves upstairs for her wraps, and Mrs. Davidge, refusing, as she laughingly declared, to assume entire charge of the men, followed almost immediately.

"I am the immediate cause of the severance of peaceful relations with Mr. Chadeller, I presume," said Waldron, when they were alone. "You felt that circumstances warranted such action, I have no doubt, yet I am sorry to have been the particular element of discord."

"I felt entirely justified, yes," replied Jack. "The man reflected unkindly and unnecessarily upon my guest. His impudence to me I might have overlooked rather than be disagreeable in my own home, but he forfeited that consideration when he ceased to remember that he was himself a guest."

"Ready!" announced Maude, as she descended the stairs. "Good-night," she said, giving Waldron her hand, and a pretty smile. "I shall send Jack back immediately."

"Take the big chair, and light up your weed, old man —I shall not be long," said Jack, as he left his guest in sole possession.

CHAPTER XV

"DO I INTRUDE?"

IN the great easy chair, the soft glow of the shaded light falling full upon his upturned face, comfortably reposed the lone occupant of the room. Silently he sent ring after ring of fragrant smoke into space which disappeared one after the other even as his thoughts took wings, and left no trace of their coming or their going. All unconscious was he of a white-robed figure that was softly, almost timidly, descending the stairs; all unconscious of two bright eyes intently watching the smoke curling up from behind the chair, which from their point of observation was the only evidence of its occupancy. Now they roam uncertainly about; now they hesitate and seem about to retreat. Ah! now they sparkle with merriment and—

"Do I intrude?" queried a laughing voice, breaking the silence.

"No. Do I?" inquired the man, rising from the chair.

"That sir, cannot be, since it is your privacy that is invaded."

"Ah!" expressive of satisfaction.

"I was conscious of the odor of a very good cigar, which suggested the thought that there must surely be a man in the immediate vicinity."

"A not illogical conclusion," he admitted.

"The thought also occurred to me, that if I followed the smoke of that cigar far enough I might find a man at the end of it—perhaps a very lonesome man. So I trailed you."

"Your theory certainly possesses the merit of practical demonstration. You don't object to the cigar?"

"On the contrary, I adore a cigar. It gives one such a comfortable feeling to know that a man is somewhere about the place."

"Now that the man is discovered, what would you suggest? Will you come down, or—shall I come up?"

"Neither, if you please, sir. I might suggest a telephone, if you feel unequal to the distance."

"Very sorry, but I don't happen to have one about me."

"Very well, then, if you are really inspired by a desire to make the best of a bad situation, you might move your chair over here," indicating a space in front of the landing, "and I will possess myself of the gallery, and you may talk to me until Jack returns. This is perfectly lovely!" she exclaimed, a moment later when he had drawn the big chair across the room, and she had seated herself on the little bench-like arrangement extending around the landing. "I will be the audience, and you may be the actor, if you please. Fancy me the gallery—a whole row of little gallery gods—"

"Rather, queen of the heavens," he gently interposed.

"Thank you, most gallant mummer," making him a pretty courtesy. "Queen, then, since your fancy is better pleased."

"And what part do you think me best fitted to enact?" he inquired, entering into the spirit of her mood.

"Is it possible you do not know? Why, heroic melodrama, to be sure. Arrayed in the picturesque garb of the plains, you are quite the ideal hero. Oh, yes, we have met before!" she laughed, in answer to his look of surprised inquiry, "and I have seen you gorgeously arrayed in all your habiliments of war."

"Ah, indeed! The drama is developing most unexpected and no less interesting possibilities."

"Have a care, sir. It may develop undesirable situations as well!"

"And what may have been our relations upon this particular occasion, may I ask?"

"Really, sir, you are positively embarrassing. Permit me to assure you that my intentions are honorable—quite honorable."

"Can it be that we were soul affinities drawn to a blessed re-union—"

"Sir!"

"Or mere corporeal entities that meet to-day only to part to-morrow," he inquired, with an assumption of seriousness.

"We are likely to part very soon at the pace you have set, sir. I confess my inability to follow you," she declared, with considerable spirit.

"What, then, may we consider the present state of our relations—say a conservative estimate?"

"Nil! I refuse to force my acquaintance upon a man who regards it with such utter indifference," she declared, with impressive dignity.

"Would a broader and more liberal interpretation tend to simplify matters, and advance the acquaintance to

any considerable degree?" he inquired, with fine distinction.

"Pray, sir, do not concern yourself further. I refuse absolutely to discuss the matter. It is really of no importance whether we have met before, or whether we ever meet again. Why I ever mentioned the ridiculous subject is quite beyond me. I shall wish you good-night, sir," she told him, with chilling and dignified composure, rising from her seat, preparing to take her departure.

"Pardon me, but it is of the utmost importance—to me," he qualified, with rare good judgment. "Believe me," he said, quite humbly, fully alive to the serious nature of his offense, "the seeming indifference which you so justly condemn is but an assumption—a weak subterfuge—a cloak, as it were to conceal my real emotions. And now that I have confessed my poor defense, I trust you will be generous and assist me to identify myself."

Was the man quite serious, or was he going from bad to worse, and simply kicking his heels behind the guise assumed, and making merry at her expense?

"You may dispense with the cloak, if you please, sir. It ill becomes you if you would know the truth. A man is sometimes judged by the coat that he wears, and it behooves him, in the present instance, to don his own and his best apparel," was the somewhat mollified, yet not entirely satisfied reply.

"Thank you," he said, bowing contritely. "You are very generous—as generous as you are beautiful, I would say, did I not fear that my temerity might suffer rebuke. In the meantime my identity remains to be established."

"Permit me to suggest that your temerity will be less conspicuous and less liable to suffer rebuke, if you refrain from irrelevant observations," she declared, with considerable asperity.

"Would it not be well, then, to definitely establish the particular basis on which we are supposed to stand at the present moment?"

"To corroborate my assertion, yes—for no other reason. I shall be very generous—more generous than you deserve—"

"Ah, I knew it!"

"I shall offer, say, three suggestions," she continued, very frigidly, "which may serve to start your mental machinery to working. Time—about eighteen months ago. Place—Colorado. Scene—harrowing. Now, sir."

"And if my mental machinery fails to perform the allotted task?"

"The subject will then be dismissed for all time. I can but feel that your recollection should not be less than mine. All this should be very embarrassing to me, but it is not—it's annoying, pure and simple."

"I have no alternative but to accept your conditions. Is there any limit to the game—time?"

"Please to remember, sir, that this is not a game, but a very serious matter. I advise you to search well the hidden recesses of your memory. The tolerance I am according you is merely to justify my assertion that we have met before—nothing more."

"Thank you," he softly murmured, bowing his appreciation of the very great consideration accorded him. "Your kind admonition is not lost upon me."

Silence most profound fell upon the scene. Only the

ticking of the little timepiece disturbed the stillness of the room which seemed to grow deeper and more intense with each swing of the tiny pendulum. The man seemed to be in deep and serious meditation, once or twice glancing up at his companion from his position back of the big easy chair over which he was leaning, as if, perchance, to recall some connecting link which persisted in eluding him. The lady was serenely indifferent, and apparently interested in anything and everything in the room except the man, of whose presence she was entirely oblivious. It was his fate that was hanging in the balance, and with that she had naught to do.

"Ah, yes, I have it!" he exultantly exclaimed, suddenly breaking the silence. "You were on the train stalled in the Grand Cañon—"

"Cold—very cold!" she icily interrupted.

"Burr'r!" shrugging his shoulders. "Yes, it was—and is!"

"I did not allude to the particular degree of temperature, sir. I merely meant that you were wrong—not even on the trail. Is not that a technical term of your profession that you should recognize?"

"Quite true, indeed. Positively stupid of me not to recognize the vernacular of my profession."

No reply to this remark was vouchsafed, which approached rather near the danger line of facetiousness, and was hardly in keeping with the serious nature of the matter in hand. Another lapse into silence.

Finally, more speculatively than positively, he said, "Perhaps you were in the Antlers, at the Springs, when it burned—"

"Warmer—warmer, but still some distance off," she again interposed, with most discouraging indifference.

"That is certainly a conservative estimate. Now I should have said it was hot—hot as—"

"Beware, sir!"

"It could well be. However, that is a mere matter of opinion."

"I have warned you, sir—I made no reference to the particular temperature of the incident. You are quite hopeless," she told him despairingly, studiously averting her eyes.

"I believe I am, notwithstanding my one remaining chance. Is there really no hope of succor before taking my final plunge?" he was concerned to know.

"Really, sir, your condition seems quite pitiable, but I fear that I can do little for you," she felt constrained to reply, but with considerable less severity.

"I fear you fail to appreciate the very great disadvantage under which I am laboring. Verily, it is a search for the proverbial needle to discover myself in the mass of perplexities in which I have been involved during the past two years. Now I would suggest—"

"I do not care to entertain any suggestions from you, sir," she interposed, with difficulty refraining from laughing outright, her indignation not being proof against the supreme good nature of the man. "Can it be possible that I am really taxing your poor mentalities too severely —should I be more lenient?" she said, regarding him uncertainly, not quite satisfied that he was deserving of consideration.

Her indecision was of short duration—the woman triumphed.

CHAPTER XVI

A MAN WHO DARED

SURELY, sir, you cannot have forgotten that terrible night out in the Colorado mountains, when the overland express, tearing down the mountain side in the dead of night, plunged headlong into a train of cattle? Ah, surely, you must remember that awful scene, far beyond the power of words to adequately portray. Those poor people who never knew what fate befell them, yet far more fortunate than the miserable creatures to whom death finally came as a grateful deliverance. And those other poor creatures! How piteous their long drawn cries, almost human in their helpless appeals; how they echoed against the great mountain sides towering high above us—those black terrifying shadows of the night. And the scene—the whole wild, weird, terrible scene—lighted up by the flames of the burning cars relentlessly consuming everything within their reach, and man utterly powerless to stay their way."

"It was indeed terrible," he said, with quiet seriousness.

"And you—you were everywhere present. Time after time you went into the burning cars, returning with some unfortunate in your arms. Each time you disappeared into those roaring furnaces—they were little less

—I held my breath, fearing, dreading, lest you might never return. It seemed there must certainly be a limit to your strength if not to your will. Not until the cars were entirely wrapped in flames did you desist from your work of rescue, and then you set about making the wounded comfortable, working with untiring strength, doing the right thing at the right time, and with always a kind and encouraging word for those in distress.

"But, Oh! can death never be so terrible—so sacred—as to inspire respect in living man? Suddenly the terrifying and sickening cry of 'robbers' rang out. It was true—the dead were being robbed! Immediately all was commotion among the little band of survivors. Those who had retained a few scattered senses after the first terrible shock, simply and completely lost them in the presence of this new terror. I should not say all. I caught just a fleeting glimpse of a form I recognized disappearing into the little clump of trees from whence the cry arose, and almost immediately several shots rang out. Such awful portent those shots seemed to echo! I think my heart stopped beating for a time—the very atmosphere seemed charged with terror. I was sure that you had been saved from the flames to die—Oh! so cruelly, it seemed—at the hands of those robbers, and you had simply rushed to your death. An age seemed to pass before you emerged from the woods dragging two despicable looking objects after you, and dropping them on the ground in the full glare of the flames, warned them that if they attempted to escape, you would—do you remember what you told them?" she inquired, pausing abruptly, and regarding him curiously.

"I dare say an apology may be in order—even at this late day," he replied, somewhat dubiously.

"I shall not attempt to quote you literally for obvious reasons but it is well that you should know what a very terrible man you can be upon occasion. You expressed the opinion that a well defined purging would have a beneficial effect not only upon the culprits themselves, but upon the community at large, which you seemed firmly convinced could best be accomplished by reducing them to ashes. I think they believed you. I am sure I did, and I hoped, bad as they were, and as much as I disliked their company, they would not attempt to escape. We were taken away by the relief train just before daylight. I made inquiries for you, as I wished to thank you for the many little things you had done for me, but you had disappeared."

"What you have said concerning my part in the unfortunate affair is in a measure true, to be sure, yet you are pleased to place far too high an estimate upon what was the least one could do under such conditions," he told her, depreciatingly, after an interval of silence. "There is so little that one is able to accomplish under such trying circumstances he feels that censure, rather than commendation should be his portion—the will is so great, the strength so small."

"Ah, yes! I know but too well. One never seems so utterly helpless as when a consciousness of the weakness of the flesh compared with the strength of the will is forced upon one. A woman feels so weak and helpless when strength and courage are required—"

"There is a strength and courage that man knows naught of," he gently but firmly interposed. "More ten-

der hands than mine were at work that night assuaging pain and thirst, and binding wounds. Softer words than mine gave courage to motherless children and childless mothers, and strong men dazed and helpless. More loving arms than mine pillowed helpless heads and broken forms. Ah, yes! You were a ministering angel that night, and sometimes I thought as I saw you flitting from one poor form to another, performing countless little offices that only a woman's heart could prompt, or hand could do, how much greater and nobler is the strength of her love; how much nearer the divine precept is the spirit of her sweet ministrations, than the brute strength on which men pride themselves."

"And you—you really believe all this?" she cried, almost incredulously, a suspicious moistening in her eyes.

"Every word," he replied, with solemn conviction.

"Oh, that I might believe it as well! That I might honestly believe myself worthy of such high esteem—such manly appreciation."

"Then, too, your woman's wit came to the rescue when bandages were so sorely needed, and more than one poor fellow has you to thank for your prompt sacrifice—"

"I forbid, sir; not another syllable!" she commanded. "You are dealing with suppositions entirely unjustifiable at this late day," she declared, with an assumption of seriousness.

"My ideas are general, rather than specific, I must admit, but sufficient to know—"

"I fear, sir, that you are still on dangerous ground," she again admonished.

"Very well, we will rest the case—admitting the sacrifice," he insisted.

"You are convinced, then, that we have really met before?"

"I never doubted."

"And when, pray, did the fact first dawn upon you?"

"When you first entered this room."

Did she hear aright? Surprise and incredulity were depicted upon her countenance as she silently regarded the man before her. "Am I to understand, sir, that you permitted me to believe you did not recall our previous meeting, yet you were conscious of the fact from the very beginning?"

"Your expression is painfully plain and correct."

"May I ask you, sir, to be equally plain, and explain your motives? Possibly I can be made to see the joke. I am inclined to look upon the ridiculous side if one exists, but in this particular instance it seems somewhat obscure," she replied, with calm cynicism, betokening no good.

"Indeed, good lady, you flatter me. 'Tis no joke—but a play—a bit of the melodrama at the special request of the gallery—Queen of the heavens. You are pleased to pay my poor histrionic abilities a high compliment indeed."

Her features, as she regarded this most excellent actor, slowly relaxed, and moulded themselves into a pretty smile as the ridiculous nature of the situation became more apparent. "Well, of all—I am quite at a loss for the word I require. And so I carefully prepared a pitfall and deliberately proceeded to throw myself into

it for your amusement, which was very obliging of me, was it not?"

"If the part was not to your liking, you must remember that it was not of my choosing," he told her, impenitently.

"None the less, sir, I think you a very bad actor—I do not approve of your style in the least. I am unable to discover whether you are simply poking fun at me, or carrying a chip on your shoulder and inviting me to knock it off. Oh, I am not so sure!" replying to a gesture of protest on his part. "I have an idea that I recognize certain belligerent tendencies. If it is the former, I object—seriously. If the latter, your desire may be gratified in a manner least expected, for be it known, I positively revel in a pitched battle with an able-bodied man, and I further give you fair warning, quarter will not be asked nor given. Now, sir, I consider myself absolved from all responsibility of whatsoever kind or character."

Surely, man, this dire ultimatum of relentless femininity is not lost upon you—you are not brave unto rashness. Will you not gracefully retire while yet the way is open? Will you persistently offer battle to one on whom the flush of victory rests so lightly that she is audaciously aggressive in the very strength that has never known defeat? Brave men have sought and fought, only to succumb—men more practiced in an art of warfare for which you are little fitted by training and experience, and perhaps too little proficient to make even an interesting opponent.

Lives there a man so wondrous wise, that he can tell another of the whys and wherefores, ways and means to

pursue, when a woman—a lovely woman leads the way? And does it really matter much, and do the best laid plans, or advice of wisest sage avail, when a woman—a lovely woman would have her way?

"I think you may consider yourself absolved from all responsibility," he told her. "There seems to be a most commendable desire extant to make me the architect of my own fortunes—or misfortunes. You are kind enough to corroborate a previous warning, to which I now incline to believe I gave too little heed."

"Indeed! And are you still playing a part, or—yourself? And what, pray, were you warned against, may I ask?"

"I was warned against this same aggressiveness, of which you speak. That people—men in particular—must be subservient to your will."

"Go on, sir, if you please! I trust you will not permit a false delicacy to withhold any part of this very timely warning you have received," she told him, with chilling cynicism.

"You may not be aware of the fact, but you make monkeys of men—drive them with a high hand—according to my informant," coolly explained this reckless wretch.

"Do I? Indeed! And what if I do? Now I am angry—very, very angry, sir. So very angry I am not angry—if you can understand me—I am quite beyond."

"Yes, curious—that is the stage beyond," calmly replied the unscrupulous man, evidently bent upon bringing about his complete undoing.

"You are right, sir—I am curious. And what more did

this friend of mine—friend, I presume—warn you against?"

"To be sure, a very warm friend, who further advised me to beware of your irresistible fascinations—fatal to the average man. That in affairs of the heart you were quite impossible."

"Monstrous! Your informant was Jack, the rascal. I recognize his handiwork. He shall suffer a bad quarter of an hour tomorrow. And you—you listened to him. Very gallant, sir, indeed;" she told him, with withering sarcasm.

"Yes, I confess. I did enter a protest or two—"

"Still, you were not compelled to listen."

"Quite true. I might have choked the rascal, which I seriously contemplated, but there again, a difficulty presented itself. I should have been gallant, but an exceedingly rude guest—one may not choke one's host with impunity. After all, no harm has been done. The admonition, I am sure, was as unnecessary as well intended."

"Your meaning, sir, is still somewhat obscure. What am I to infer by 'unnecessary'?" she demanded, her curiosity still greater than her anger.

"Simply that the young man entertained an exaggerated idea of the dangers against which he so considerately warned me," was the somewhat ambiguous reply.

"The conversation, I am free to admit, has taken rather a peculiar trend. I must also admit that I feel at a certain disadvantage; but as it all seems quite clear to you perhaps you will be so good as to enlighten me—I am still quite curious, you see. Just what do

you mean? Do you mean that you concede me the benefit of the doubt? Or do you think me a particularly disagreeable and undesirable sort of person generally, and—well, to be perfectly frank, as you seem to encourage candor—am I to understand that you see nothing in me to commend, or to interest your lordship? Am I quite clear?"

"Perfectly clear, but a trifle unjust to yourself. I can conceive much, not alone to commend, but to interest. I can also conceive of men offering their hands, their hearts, their souls, their all, at the shrine of their heart's most fondly worshiped idol, each craving with all the ardor of human desire that he may be the elect of his fellows. Obviously then, the happiness of the one must be the misery of the many. Equally obvious, and no less providential, is the fact that this poor creature man is of opposing minds, and while many may strive for a coveted possession, others are content to stand aside and watch the struggle from afar with no greater interest than to see the best man win."

"Really, sir, you are most generous! If one must be so unfortunate as to be regarded with such utter and complete indifference by even a comparative stranger, it is at least gratifying to know that one is not necessarily responsible. All this is intensely interesting and edifying. Do you mind telling me the particular ideal to which your fancy turns in its untrammeled flights? I am merely curious to know the peculiar ideas of a very peculiar man—and a very bold one, if he would know my private opinion."

The ominous clouds had passed away. Slowly but surely the sun's rays had penetrated the gathering dark-

ness when thunder and lightning and deluge most dire seemed about to descend upon him who recklessly braved their fury.

"I am really at a loss which to admire the more; your unqualified assurance, or my good nature in calmly sitting by and permitting myself to be maligned at the hands of a reckless stranger. I think, too, I am somewhat surprised at myself. The experience is certainly novel, and perhaps for that reason more interesting than might be a repetition. Do you know," she said, looking at him somewhat curiously, "I am half inclined to believe that you may possess possibilities useful to me—if you are well disposed."

"I am amenable to any reasonable proposition," he replied, with becoming modesty.

"For instance," she continued, disregarding his reply, "the advantage of knowing that a man will not by any chance fancy himself in love, and declare himself at odd and uncertain intervals, is incalculable. Such little eccentricities on the part of your sex are more or less embarrassing, and creative of a certain constraint according to the ardor and frequency with which they occur. One is thus relieved of many responsibilities and —Oh! I can think of advantages too numerous to mention."

"We are sure to get on, if all your requirements are equally simple," he gravely assured her.

"The idea is charming—positively alluring in the mere contemplation," she declared, but whether sincere, or merely facetiously cynical, was not quite clear. "To begin with, I have a very unruly horse. He has behaved very badly, and has disgraced himself generally

in the estimation of several of my friends—he is also quite beyond my groom. I assume that you are an expert in the management of horses, and I shall expect you to immediately take him in hand and exert your influence over his fractious spirits. I have discovered that the man possesses a similar spirit, and I shall closely observe his methods in dealing with the beast, and perhaps apply them to the man himself, if he behaves so badly again—beware, sir!"

"I trust there will be no occasion for extreme measures—with man or beast," he replied, with due gravity.

"Then it is quite understood—we are to be friends? Very well, there's my hand—as you men say," rising and offering him her hand and a very gracious smile as well. "Friends, then—good-night."

And so it was that this man and this woman met once upon a time out in that wild country under circumstances which try men's souls. Each had unconsciously shown the other a depth and strength of character, a love and sympathy for their fellows of no common order, and after a lapse of time had been brought together by chance or some strangely ordered plan. What was the portent? Were they mere creatures of circumstances—or were they moulding life's plastic forces in the strength and fullness of their own divine endowments? Who shall say?

CHAPTER XVII

"LOVE, INDEED!"

THE family and its guests attended services next morning in the little church not far distant, as had been the custom of father and mother even before the memorable day when they had been joined in holy wedlock beneath the old roof. Pastors had come and gone; some called to positions of greater responsibility; others, they knew not whither. New churches and new creeds had come one after another, but the little family continued to worship in the ivy-covered little pile, sacred to the memories of the past.

Cathalee was no less loyal to the little house of worship, and not a few were the trips she made from the city for no other purpose than to attend the simple service, in which she seemed to find a distinct pleasure and satisfaction. She had declared upon one occasion, in answer to a query propounded by a friend who marveled at this, to her, unaccountable eccentricity, that she felt a sense of peace and repose within the walls of the little church that she had never experienced in the more imposing edifice in the city in which she was wont to worship. She liked the simple and sincere sermons; she dearly loved to look out on the green fields and waving branches, and breathe the sweet perfumes wafted in through the open windows. "And when," she added, with characteristic

enthusiasm, "the joyous voices of the little feathered songsters mingle with the gladsome songs of man in one long sweet refrain, all nature seems to be lifting up its voice and pouring out its heart in glad rejoicing. Is it not glorious, is it not sublime," her enthusiasm increasing, "to think—just to think—if we only knew ourselves better, or if the great laws of our being could be made clear to us, we might always be happy and content, and dwell in the paradise of which we catch such a little glimpse when our souls are *en rapport,* and our voices attuned to nature's chords? Ah! but it is unfortunate we know ourselves so little. Are we wilfully ignorant, or is it such a great problem that we cannot understand, and are we never to know?" She might be old-fashioned, she admitted, when further pressed, but she preferred her religion distinct from a social function. Yes, she further admitted, it was doubtless her misfortune that she was not able to reconcile the two, but such being the case, she was compelled to choose methods and means adapted to her limited mentality—depraved, perhaps—but really, what could be expected of a poor mortal so afflicted.

"Why, Jack, where is Edith?" inquired Mrs. Winston, as the little party was about setting out for church.

"She has been trying for an hour or more to arrange her hair like Cathalee's. I offered to assist her, but she—"

"Declined your valuable services," Maude supplied.

"Good guess! She pushed me out, locked the door, and declared it was bad enough to be a girl without having a nuisance of a brother. Poor sis! She is certainly in hard luck."

"As I am the recipient of such a pretty compliment, it behooves me to see that I am correctly interpreted," laughed Cathalee, running lightly up the stairs.

"Mine enemy!" laughed Jack, looking after her in undisguised admiration. "She is not on speaking terms with me," he said, addressing Waldron. "Says I have irredeemably distinguished myself this time. You behaved very badly last evening, sir, but it was all my fault, it seems. What do you think of that for logic?"

"A woman's logic is not limited by man's understanding," that gentleman briefly observed.

"She says that between us both, we don't leave a poor woman a shred of reputation. I felt positively undone when she had finished with me."

Jack's remarks were cut short by the return of the subject thereof accompanied by Edith, the unruly locks under control, and a very pretty and blushing apology made for keeping the party waiting.

"I fancy this is quite an unexpected pleasure for Mr. Waldron," said Cathalee, as a start was finally made, "but it is a penance we exact impartially from all our friends, and I am sufficiently depraved to feel a brutal satisfaction when I have been the means of dragging a poor man off to church against his will. Oh, yes! It is quite true!" she insisted, pausing to note the effect of this dire confession. "You men!" shaking her pretty head, "are beyond redemption at mortal hands, I fear—you can only be tormented occasionally when you are caught unawares."

At the conclusion of the services she informed him that he had behaved very well, but was beyond all doubt a self-confessed martyr. He was so very grave that she

was prompted to inscribe an epitaph to his lately departed thoughts, the gravity of which impeachment he made no attempt to deny.

The little family bereft of its father and stronger guardian, earnestly and reverently offering its simple devotion to the great Ruler, and asking for strength and guidance; the sweet little face at his side blushing with maidenly modesty when bright eyes met his; the daintily gloved little hands flying over the leaves, and finding hymns and passages almost before the preacher's voice had died away; the little voice blending its plaintive sweetness with the many, and reverently repeating the humble petition as the little head was bowed in prayer, all tended to make him serious. And perchance his thoughts strayed away to that far country—to his own life among scenes and people so vastly different, yet children of the one great family; to life in the great city—its multitude of complexities; to life—the great problem. Perhaps, too, his thoughts took him in their winged flight back to the days even more remote when he, the only child of loving parents, bowed his head, and breathed the same enduring words of hope and supplication—those days of childhood's happy hours when he was privileged the sweet companionship and solace of a mother's love, and a father's wisdom and guidance. But what had been his life since those days long past? How little had parental prayers and plans availed against a higher power. What destiny was this same immutable law preparing for the sweet young soul at his side? Would her life be embittered by the sin and wretchedness of the great world? Would she soon be drawn into the turmoil from which her young life had been shielded, and of which she was

blissfully unconscious? Or would she blossom into the fruition of her womanhood, protected and guarded by the strength of him into whose keeping she gave her life? God grant it might be! God grant that the mother's prayers for her children be not without avail!

The first impressions of the young miss concerning the stranger were seemingly justified by further acquaintance, and they were soon on terms of good comradeship. He was early made acquainted with her pets—a particular mark of esteem and confidence. Her dog—the greatest of his kind in the estimation of his mistress—wagged approval of the big stranger of kindly voice who talked to him familiarly, and appreciated his fine points. Old Dick blinked approval of his biography as set forth by his little mistress—no equine could quite compare with Dick. Her garden plots, favorite nooks and corners indoors and out were duly explored, and the man unconsciously made possessor of many an innocent thought and girlish confidence—indeed, it seemed never to occur to the little miss that she might not repose the most implicit confidence in her new friend.

If he had thought to receive all this attention without giving value received, he was quickly undeceived. All unconsciously was he led into one of the cosy corners of his little hostess, a comfortable place made for him, and a running fire of questions suddenly flung at him which only the curiosity of youthful enthusiasm could suggest.

Nor was the little miss the only one impelled to interest herself in his behalf. A certain other friend seemed to find a keen delight in covert flings and innuendos whenever opportunity presented. Perhaps in retaliation for

the questionable treatment received at his hands the night before; he should be made to pay dearly for his temerity, and his office of friend to her majesty, the fair Cathalee, might not prove to be the sinecure he seemed to anticipate. However, there was no outward evidence that a vulnerable spot had been reached. On the contrary, he received the winged shafts with the most exasperating indifference and good nature. Perhaps he considered turn about fair play, and was entirely willing that the other side should have a fling. Perhaps, again, he merely bided his time when he might catch his charming tormentor off her guard, and with one fell swoop put to rout the arch enemy persistently preying upon his good nature. Many things come to him who waits—and to her as well.

"Still in the land of dreams?" she queried, pausing on the landing, and contemplating the man of thoughtful mien, who chanced at that moment to be alone in the living-room. "Not a penny for your thoughts, but your thoughts gratis. Surely none but a lover could gaze so far away into nothingness and find so much to interest him."

"Man is ever at a disadvantage with your sex. Even his innermost thoughts are not sacred from intrusion, but must be laid bare at the passing fancy of the first fair creature who chances to interest herself in his behalf," he replied, with complacent resignation.

"Now that I have discovered your secret you must take me into your confidence. Now don't tell me that I am entirely wrong—I simply refuse to have my divinations ruthlessly upset. Besides, you have already committed yourself—tacitly admitted that you are a slave to

the divine passion," she insisted, with laughing good nature.

"Strange to say, I don't know," he said, somewhat doubtfully. "Sometimes I think I may have experienced the great passion; again I am not so sure."

"How very interesting! Give me your symptoms, sir, and I will very quickly set your mind at rest as to whether you are suffering from an acute attack, or from a counterfeit presentment."

"You are most kind to interest yourself in my poor love affairs; yet perhaps you may be able to assist me very appreciably—a woman's insight is so much deeper than a man's."

"That you are willing to confide in me is a compliment in itself, and in return for your confidence, I shall be very interested, and render my very best judgment. I shall remain right here where I calmly sat last evening and permitted myself to be assailed and reviled by a comparative stranger. Aren't you ashamed of yourself to-day, sir? I have since wondered how I came to put up with your insolence. But that is another story. We are friends now, and you have a very interesting story to tell me, I am sure."

"I believe the story is not without a certain element of interest," he modestly admitted.

"You must tell me everything—reserving nothing. The whole truth to your doctor, lawyer and—love's confessor," she stipulated. "Please begin at once—I am all impatience."

"It is not a long story—I shall trespass but little upon your good nature. It all happened in Chicago—in a very brief interval, I may say. One late afternoon, some six

months ago, I chanced to be passing along Randolph Street, between State and Wabash—I mention these little details, not because they have a direct bearing upon the vital point in question, but merely to localize the incident. My mind, as I well remember, was busily engaged with matters of serious import, and my eyes, as not infrequently happens when my mind is thus employed, were directed downwards. Suddenly, without volition of my own, I could almost swear, I raised my eyes and looked directly into those of a lady who chanced to be passing at that instant."

"How very interesting!" exclaimed the fair confessor. "Please go on quickly—I can see possibilities."

"She was a beautiful creature!" he continued, with profound emphasis. "I shall not attempt to describe her—mere words are inadequate to portray such loveliness as met my eyes."

"How beautiful she must have been!" she unconsciously exclaimed. "Was she tall and fair, or—I want to know more about her!" she protested.

"I think that the instant our eyes met," he continued, ignoring her protest, "I stopped short and, I dare say, gave other outward evidence of the tumult raging within me. That this was not our first meeting—that I had known her at some remote period of my existence was the strange freak my fancy played me. The sensation of ecstatic bliss that accompanied this unaccountable fancy is beyond my power to describe. Was it a soul recognition? Was it merely a chance happening? Or was it only fancy on my part? What was it—that was the vexed question. No especial hypothesis seemed struggling for recognition. My subjective consciousness evi-

dently deemed it unnecessary or inexpedient to enlighten my grosser self."

"What happened then?" she demanded, with eager interest. "Please do not stop at such a very interesting situation."

"When I finally recovered my presence of mind, she had passed. I turned, but she had disappeared in the crowd. The glance, short as it was, had enabled me to take a mental photograph of that fair face, and whichever way I turned, the same beautiful vision confronted me."

"You turned and followed?" she demanded, with breathless interest. "You followed her—"

"No, not at all," he coolly replied, comfortably disposing of himself in the easy chair.

"Ah, I understand! You met her afterwards—became acquainted, and—well, matters are not progressing to your satisfaction. Am I right?"

"Cold—very cold."

"There now, sir, I do seriously object!" she vigorously protested. "That is past. I have forgiven you, and the least you can do is to refrain from poking fun at me—which is particularly unkind at the present moment."

"Your pardon. I have no more wish to offend, than I am ungrateful for your very kind offices in my behalf," he replied, with deep humility.

"I fear I cannot hope to suggest the outcome of the incident; besides, I am not to guess—you are to tell me, and I am to render judgment, you know."

"My understanding, exactly. The evidence is quite complete. The case now rests with the court. The point at issue is: Did the individual in question, to the best of

the knowledge and belief of said court, in that one brief instant experience the great and divine passion—the highest and noblest—the great desideratum of human life —said to be?"

"Well, of all ridiculous nonsense, I have never heard the equal!" exclaimed the surprised and indignant court, starting to its feet, "except my own in sitting calmly by and helping to ridicule myself. As for your love affair, you simply mistook the seat of your ailment—you should have tried a tonic. That is the opinion of the court to which you are entirely welcome," and the outraged court swept majestically up the stairs, leaving the cause of its abrupt adjournment to continue his meditations undisturbed.

Her indignation, however, was not of long duration, and when she appeared at tea a little later, she was once more in full possession of her good nature. Moreover, she frankly informed the family of the manner in which a certain lady of worldly experience had been ruthlessly duped—a perfect brick swindling scheme, she declared—by a certain mild-mannered man from the West; and casting an arch glance at the individual in question, she expressed the firm conviction that in the future that particular lady would not be so fast to interest herself in the love affairs of another—love, indeed!

CHAPTER XVIII

A FRIEND IN NEED AND DEED

TRUE to his promise, Waldron kept his young friend in sight, and in various ways encouraged an intimacy which could not result other than to the advantage of the younger man. In this closer acquaintance the young man came to understand and appreciate more and more the character of the man with whom he had so strangely become associated. Almost immediately he became conscious of a new element of strength in his life. He seemed to have suddenly acquired a new process of reasoning which at times waged bitter conflict with many of his preconceived and deeply rooted ideas. The more serious and complex problems of his life which he had been wont to regard almost as a divine decree directed against his individual well-being, gradually assumed a less portentous aspect in the light of his new strength and understanding, while the countless petty annoyances, ever a menace to his peace of mind, his hopes and aspirations, he soon discovered were but the creatures of his fancy—a weak spot in his undeveloped character—and entitled to serious consideration only as they were permitted to obtrude themselves into his life. In short, he was slowly and surely made to realize that he was something more than a mere creature of circumstance; that he possessed possibilities and attributes in

common with the greatest as well as the lowliest of his fellows, which required only an opportunity for a free and natural expression to expand and develop into the fullness of their power and purpose—an innate strength to be made subservient to his will—his servant rather than his master.

"What particular burden is weighing upon your mind to-night?" inquired Waldron, quickly discerning that something was amiss with the young man, when he appeared at his hotel one evening quite unexpectedly.

"I am simply ashamed to tell you. You will certainly think me a hoodoo—I believe I am."

"I am a first-class antidote for hoodoos," laughed Waldron. "Fire away while I add a few deft touches to my evening toilet."

"It seems that my father was interested in a wildcat railroad somewhere out West," said Jack, finally. "For some reason which I do not quite understand, it became necessary to give Mr. Burrows—of the old brokerage firm of Burrows & Company—a mortgage on our home for a temporary loan of ten thousand dollars until my father could realize on his stock of twenty-five hundred shares, which it seems Mr. Burrows also retained, as he was managing the whole affair. My mother knows little or nothing concerning business, and her recollection of the transaction is not very clear. Mr. Burrows now very considerately explains that he has not mentioned the matter since my father's death as he had no wish to cause my mother needless annoyance—that would have been my father's wish, which he was bound to respect. Moreover, he never dreamed but that the enterprise would ultimately be brought to a successful issue, when he would

have enjoyed the profound pleasure and satisfaction of handing the wife of his old and esteemed friend a very substantial balance, after deducting the amount of the loan. But alas, for human hopes and plans! Mightier forces have decreed the futility of their efforts, and much against their will, they have been compelled to abandon their last hope, and to admit the enterprise a failure. Those are not precisely his words, but substantially the same. He sends my mother the twenty-five hundred shares as a sort of mute evidence of his veracity and laudable intentions, I presume, and plainly indicates his preference for the ten thousand dollars to the worthless stock."

"Which shows him to be a man of fine discretion," Waldron quietly observed, as he drew the ends of a refractory tie into place. "Had the stock developed even small value," he continued, "Mr. Burrows would have held security several times the amount of the mortgage, in addition to the mortgage. Not a bad proposition for Mr. Burrows, seemingly; yet the fact that it did not so develop suggests that his caution was not altogether ill advised. Seems rather a late day, however, to inform your mother of the state of affairs. Suggests the possibility, to say the least, that she was bound to lose whichever way the wheel of fortune turned—too fine a point, however, to embarrass Mr. Burrows, if I know the man—and I think I do," he added, with suggestive emphasis.

"To show that he is not altogether devoid of fine feelings, he tells my mother that a certain gentleman is willing to take the mortgage off his hands at a discount, but he prefers to arrange the matter himself, especially, I presume, if he can secure the full amount. But there

is a well defined suggestion that if immediate settlement is not arranged, such a possibility must be reckoned with."

"And your mother?"

"She thinks she must give up the place immediately; she cannot contemplate the thought of owing anyone a penny rightfully belonging to him. The place will hardly bring that amount at forced sale, although before long it will be worth a great deal more, as the long anticipated improvements in the town are under way. No doubt the man that is willing to relieve Mr. Burrows of the mortgage, sees his way clear to a good investment. Gee! I wonder if Mr. Chadeller is the man and if that was what he meant that night when he washed his hands of me. You know, he deals in notes and mortgages, and handles considerable business for Burrows & Company not exactly in their line. He has been picking up considerable property down there recently. Yes, that's the combination, as I'm alive!"

"Where is this railroad—the cause of all the trouble?" inquired Waldron, paying little heed to the excited speculations of the young man.

"Oh, New Mexico, I believe! Seems to have been sort of a private enterprise—branch from the main line running up into the mining camps in the mountains. I did not take particular notice, but the certificates are so gorgeously gotten up that they made something of an impression on my mind. One scene shows a train of cars running through a beautiful valley, grazing herds as far as the eye can reach. Another depicts a scene up in the mountains where all hands appear to be digging up golden nuggets, and seemingly possessed of a wild desire to call the whole crowd up to this golden Mecca where gold and

joy are free as air," explained the young man, whose opinion of Western enterprise was not flattering.

"What is the name of this railroad, or were you lost to all save admiration for its stock certificates?" inquired Waldron, mildly amused at this malignant outburst against the country of his adoption.

"The N. M. C.—New Mexico Consolidated, I believe. If you attempted to locate it, you would probably find that it began in the minds of its promoters and ended in a squirrel trail up a tree over yonder—or thereabouts," replied the young man, with ill-concealed disgust.

"You are not altogether right, nor wholly wrong, in your general supposition," said Waldron, after a while. "This Golden Mecca to which you refer is the Arapahoe mining district of New Mexico, and it may surprise you to know that this railroad of yours of such vague beginning and uncertain ending, is the outlet of this same district."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the youth, in breathless amazement.

"And what is more," Waldron continued, "in my humble opinion, your friend Mr. Burrows is the commander-in-chief of a select band of stock-jobbers whose operations in Consolidated Properties and other stocks have become so notorious."

"I know—everybody knows. They have certainly played their game to the limit."

"My business here is to take a hand in this particular game so far as it relates to Consolidated Properties, as I chance to be interested in these same Properties."

"You!" cried Jack, in deeper amazement. "And are you making the fight alone?"

"I am playing practically a lone hand. For the present, I am not in evidence. My brokers are quietly picking up all the loose stock in sight, not working the least aggressively, however, as I do not wish to create the suspicion that the stock is being cornered. I have been using my best efforts to point out as unobtrusively as possible the particular course I would have the opposing forces pursue, and thus far they have shown a fairly commendable inclination to comply with my desires. For instance: Several times during the past two or three weeks I have started small upward movements in the stock, quietly taking on all that was offered at certain figures—I am not prepared to show my hand and go out gunning for the large blocks. A few days ago I put the mills on half time, and started a brisk upward turn. They immediately discovered through sources of their own that the mills were running short, and very properly jumped at the conclusion that lack of ore must be the cause, and sold quite briskly, well satisfied that the flurry was not justified by actual conditions at the mines, which would have caused a contrary movement. After gathering in a goodly quantity of the stock, I stopped the upward tendency, thinking it advisable to give them the impression that they still controlled the market. It is their purpose to keep the stock down and the public out until they secure control of the Properties; mine, to put the stock up and bring the public in. In the final reckoning I hope to catch them heavily short of the stock—the trap is baited with the same innocent appearing lambs they have so often sheared."

"If it is really Mr. Burrows that you have to fight, I don't envy you. You will simply be drawn and quar-

tered if you fall into his power," Jack declared, with great emphasis.

"As for Mr. Burrows," continued Waldron, ignoring the fearsome concern of his young friend, "he sacrificed his railroad and its original owners to his stock-jobbing operations, for with all his cunning he could never make it a success while the mines were abused—it became hopelessly bankrupt. He secured his commissions and thousands of shares of stock bonus for promoting it, and has never stood to lose a dollar of his own money, if the truth were known, and the ten thousand dollars he would exact from your mother is a little easy money in lieu of what he had hoped the stock might eventually net him."

"I hope you will win—many times I hope it," cried Jack, impulsively. "But it will be a fight with the odds against you. You are practically single handed against a crowd of old hands at the game who know every trick that can be turned—a crowd that will deal you a hand or two under the table if necessary. You do not fear them?" he paused to inquire, suddenly discovering that Waldron, who was pacing slowly back and forth, was not giving his remarks serious attention.

"No," said Waldron, after a silence so long that Jack had concluded his query had not been heeded. "No," he repeated, pausing in his walk and looking absently out of the window, "I almost wish I did—I might then have some respect for my opponents."

"What do you mean?" demanded Jack, not a little puzzled that such formidable opponents should be held in so light esteem.

"I mean," said Waldron, turning away from the window, and continuing his walk, "that I am heartily ashamed

of this squabble in which I am engaged—I cannot dignify it sufficiently to call it a fight. I am compelled to meet my adversaries on their own ground and adopt their methods. I, too, must become the gambler—the crook. I must play with marked cards because I know my opponents are doing the same. I must play these cards from under the table, and hold a few up my sleeve in case of emergency. I must forget that I am a man and subdue every natural impulse I possess. Success—if success it be—is dearly won at such a price. My opponents learn no good lesson but avenge themselves on those weaker than themselves. This is not the work for men; men may descend to it, but men can never emerge from it—the very atmosphere is stifling to manly instincts."

"I don't think I have ever gone into it so deeply—or in that particular direction," said Jack, uncertainly.

"Some of these modern Shylocks are so lost to all sense of decency on this one subject of money getting that I actually believe they would barter their very souls' salvation, were it a tangible commodity on which they could realize a few paltry dollars for temporal gratification, and chance the possibilities of eternal perdition. Did they possess the power they would insist upon running the celestial kingdom on the mundane principle with the almighty dollar ever the paramount issue and medium of exchange between the two worlds—the sole passport to choice and exclusive circles. In short, the celestial regions would forthwith be placed on a corporate plan—a rake-off for the benefit of the insiders, and labor unions barred. I don't know that I am altogether happy in my expressions. I have no desire to be irreverent—

merely graphically illustrative," said Waldron, with grim humor and sarcasm.

"I don't think you irreverent," Jack earnestly protested. "I should say that irreverence was the conspicuous characteristic of those who usurp the rights and privileges of others simply because they possess the power."

"A few words more apropos of the subject we have been discussing," Waldron continued. "I have entrusted you with valuable information. It will be better for you to know little concerning me or my affairs. I am merely a friend—from the West, if you like—which is all that is necessary for the present, in case you meet other inquisitors than Mr. Chadeller. Tell your mother not to worry about this matter, as you have reason to believe that it can be arranged without any great sacrifice. Tell her also, to take good care of those pictures; they are interesting you know, and someone may develop a greater appreciation of their value than you seem to possess."

Left alone, Waldron continued pacing to and fro as was his habit when in deep thought. Was it fate—a kind fate—that had brought him into this little family circle at the critical time when a guiding hand was so sadly needed, a steady hand at the helm until the storm was safely weathered? These young people, and the elder—scarce wiser in the ways of the world—but the merest atoms at the mercy of the great immutable force bearing them on its resistless course to happiness and hopes fulfilled, or dashing them down to the lowest depths of pain and despair as they abided or transgressed its laws. One false step, and the youth had been swept

away, but a strong arm had drawn him back. Yet another misfortune, and the cold relentless hand of avarice was reaching out for the little sheltering roof, awaiting only a favorable opportunity to wrench it from their grasp—a small delectable morsel contributing its mite to the insatiable appetite of greed—the remorseless power of might untempered by right.

But a friend in need and deed had suddenly appeared, coming upon the scene so quietly that his arrival had not been heeded. Little difference had his coming been heralded by blare of trumpets or beat of drums, except, perchance, that he might have been laughed to scorn, for what could he hope to accomplish single handed against the forces he would be called upon to meet. Time would tell.

So then, gentlemen, present your case—that which you are pleased to term your righteous cause. There is a champion at court to-day where yesterday only a widow and orphans opposed their way. Frail barrier—strong men. 'Twas scarce fair play. 'Tis now more equal, and you must fight to win. 'Tis no stripling nor aged woman that bars your way, but might and right—an able-bodied man who awaits your coming, and cares not whether or how you come. Gentlemen, at your pleasure.

CHAPTER XIX

MAN MUST CONQUER

THE regular Saturday lunching crowd was in full and animated attendance at the Waldorf. Waldron had invited his friends to a luncheon and matinee, which invitation all had enthusiastically accepted with the exception of Mrs. Winston, who had insisted that the party was far too gay for her to think of keeping pace with. The affair was generally conceded to be a compliment to Edith, and to the desires of that young lady all had meekly bowed. She had immediately declared for the Waldorf, when the all important question of the luncheon came up for consideration; she had never been inside the great hotel, and this, to be sure, was a golden opportunity not to be neglected.

"You are all right, Sis!" Jack had declared with gracious condescension. "You can be your brother's sister so long as you possess such fine discretion."

The little party was fortunate in securing a position affording an excellent view of the large dining room, and to the youngest member the scene was as a glimpse of another world. Her eyes expressed wonderment; her words quaint impressions of the people and surroundings. To her all was gold that glittered, and there was much that shone resplendent. All were men and women

quite ideal—indeed, who shall say to the contrary! Princes and princesses there seemed to be in surprising numbers upon this particular occasion, and a king or queen might shortly wander in, if a certain Jack—better called a knave—did not desist from ushering in these notables and seating them promiscuously about the place as best suited his diabolical purpose. To be sure, it seemed not unreasonable that some of these beautifully gowned and radiant creatures, or those splendid men, might be of blue, or even royal blood. But when lords and ladies simply dropped in on every hand, bright eyes glanced suspiciously, and grave doubts began to appear on the small horizon of their owner's simple knowledge of the world, which rapidly assumed larger and darker proportions, finally breaking forth in an outburst of indignant protest that peremptorily bade Jack Winston "stop his nonsense," she did not believe one word—did Mr. Waldron? And that gentleman, perforce, was compelled to admit that he was not in a position to substantiate any of the assertions of whatsoever kind or character brother had made.

If the many were a source of interest to the few, the latter were accorded no little attention. Cathalee numbered among her acquaintances many of the lunchers. Theirs was a one-star company, Jack had occasion to early remark; indeed one could hardly fail to note the very especial attention accorded that bright and particular luminary by friends and strangers alike.

Not unconsciously, another member of the party was receiving rather more than his share of the attention from a certain quarter. Miss Constance Hillman and Mr. Charles Francis Herringdon chanced to be present

with a party of friends. Could that young woman believe her eyes? "Really, there must be some mistake—a striking resemblance, surely!" Did Mr. Herringdon know the gentleman? "No—that is, yes. Really, my dear Constance, it can't be, you know—By Jove!—"

Old Major Rothford came stamping in briskly and pompously as became an ancient man of valor, and catching sight of the little group, all of whom he had known from childhood (with the exception of Waldron), charged down upon them, and accorded his usual hearty greeting. "Delighted! Believe me, sir—delighted!" he vigorously declared, giving Waldron's hand a cordial grip.

It was characteristic of the Major to accord a new acquaintance a hearty greeting, and to declare himself "Delighted—delighted, sir!" yet the penetrating glance of the sharp old eyes, which seemed to have lost none of their youthful fire, seemed to say no less plainly that this hearty initiative was probationary to the good graces of the old warrior. As for the opposite sex, the Major was far too gallant an old soldier to lend himself to even a remote possibility of causing embarrassment by such tactics, and, moreover, would doubtless have averred in his characteristic speech, "Egad! you read in a woman's eyes only what she pleases you to know," and he was merely "Delighted, madam—I assure you, delighted!" bending his straight old back with a gracious dignity a younger man might well envy.

"Bless my old soul!" he vociferated, "it does me good to see such youth and beauty," glancing around the little group. "Edith, if some young fellow doesn't catch you pretty soon and lock you up in a dark closet, you will break more hearts than Cathy one of these days. Ah,

yes, my dear!" he insisted, in reply to Cathalee's vigorous protest of "Major!" "You don't know the havoc your sex creates among us. We're a sad lot, Waldron," he solemnly declared, "they dazzle our eyes, steal our hearts, and call us fickle. It's wrong—all wrong!" he declared, wagging his ancient head. "The odds are against us."

"The Major is the most gallant old beau in New York this very minute," laughed Cathalee. "Away down deep in his heart is a firm and abiding conviction of the very great superiority of man, yet mark you the compliment he pays us."

"Egad! and I mean it—every word of it!" he vigorously protested. "My old white head, and a rebel bullet rattling around in my old anatomy, and a gout, are all that keep me from making as big a fool of myself as some of the younger chaps," he declared, as he bade adieu to his young friends, who were much amused by his infectious good humor.

The Major had retired from active service some years since on a competency sufficient to afford his declining years the comfort which a long and faithful service to his country richly entitled him. He had been fighting for his country since he could "tote" a gun—"Fought for her, and Egad, sir! bled for her too—and I'm proud of it. And there's a chip of the old block out there in the West that will go on fighting for her so long as she needs a defender, just as his old dad did before him."

The old fellow was a modern edition of the old school. He had kept pace with the times, yet his underlying character and principles were essentially of times long

past. He was old—he knew it, and had no objection to being called old. He was out of the running with the young fellows—he was an old fool!—but "Damme! there are older fools who have not discovered what everybody else has known for twenty years or more," he had declared, with characteristic vehemence upon a certain occasion when his temper had been ruffled.

He lived at his club, and despite his intimation of infirmities, enjoyed very good health, and took life very complacently. He was a general favorite with all his acquaintances, and his mood seldom varied from that in which he greeted his young friends. Cathalee was his particular protegé by virtue of a long-standing acquaintance with her parents, and rarely a week passed but the old fellow wended his way to the house on the Avenue, where he was ever a welcome guest, and dined with mother and daughter. "If that headstrong boy of mine had only consulted his old dad, instead of going off out West and marrying to suit himself," he frequently remarked to Cathalee, with a regretful and expressive shake of his venerable head. "Oh, that undutiful boy of yours!" she invariably replied, with mutual commiseration, and between them the far away soldier boy was ever the "Undutiful." Had she been his own daughter he could not have been more concerned for her welfare and happiness. "Your old father and I were boys together, Cathy," he had told her more than once, "and as my useless old life has been given me to make a nuisance of myself, and be in the way generally—which is about all I can say for myself—I am bound to do by his child as he would have done for mine if circumstances had been reversed. So, girl, you must make use of the

old Major in any way that he can serve you, because your happiness is nearer and dearer to his heart than anything else in his worn-out old life. My boy, (he speaks proudly) is a soldier—he belongs to his country, and has no need of his dad. What he is not able to do for himself, his old dad cannot do for him. When I was his age," (and the eyes of the old war-horse flash with the spirit of youth) "I was always looking for trouble and only happy when I found it—and I was happy pretty much all the time, as I look back over the march I've made. You are without father or brother, my dear, and a man who has your best interests at heart, even if he is only an old duffer, may be of use to you. Men understand men for what they really are, better than women. There are strange creatures masquerading as men in this world; they may have a definite purpose, but as yet it has not been made clear. In the meantime, they serve to cut down the general average of decency and respectability."

So it happened that the Major was a frequent escort of mother and daughter, and more or less familiar with the men of Cathalee's acquaintance. When, therefore, a stranger appeared and evinced a desire to enroll himself among the no inconsiderable number of admirers of his charge, he very soon acquainted himself with the general worthiness or unworthiness of the new-comer. Never obtrusive in these matters—the Major was far too wise an old campaigner to permit his laudable motives to encompass their own defeat by too rigid a censorship—yet he had made it clear upon several occasions that certain individuals were a menace prolific of besmirching possibilities, if no worse.

"Better let them find their own level, Cathy," he had told her. "Life is too short to stand on dress-parade before the enemy merely to show him the strength of your forces. Besides, there is always the danger that some disgruntled coward or gibbering idiot may deal a blow behind your back—putting your heel on a viper after his sting is poor satisfaction." And waxing warmer, for this was a subject on which the Major never hesitated to speak his mind, "Not alone the crawling species, my dear, run out their tongues and strike an innocent hand —they are true to their natures and may be guarded against. The others are anomalies, and for some inexplicable reason, form and instinct are not inseparable—more's the pity." His advice had invariably been heeded, as Cathalee had every confidence in his judgment, and was well satisfied that his generous and kindly old heart would not permit injustice done to any. Moreover, her own womanly instincts had told her that he had made no mistake.

It was his custom to stroll down to the Waldorf in the late afternoon, and with some old crony, or young chap, he was sure to find around the place, indulge himself to the extent of a congenial cocktail. A day or two after making Waldron's acquaintance, he chanced to run across him in the hotel, and the two enjoyed a chat over the aforesaid cocktail, at the Major's invitation. Waldron liked the frank good humor of the old fellow, and was not a little amused at his adroit and apparently disinterested inquiries concerning himself, the real object of which he was at no loss to understand. The fine hand of the Major was easily discernible in thus turning to account this chance meeting.

"By the way, Cathy, who is this man Waldron?" he inquired, in his usual matter-of-fact way, when next he saw her. "Seems very much of a stranger—nobody seems to know him," he added, as a reply was not immediately forthcoming.

"A friend of the Winstons and—mine," she replied, with a sly glance at the old fellow, well knowing the object of his inquiry. The unmistakable emphasis on the last word mildly surprised the Major—his intervention was clearly not desired in this particular instance.

"Had a little chat with him a day or two ago—accidentally ran across him down at the hotel," he told her, not quite satisfied to drop the matter so informally. "Seems a very decent sort of a chap, but better be a little careful, my dear—don't place too much reliance on appearances."

"That terrible horse of mine has again distinguished himself," said Cathalee, addressing Waldron. "Mr. Chadeller," glancing at Jack at the mention of this name, "is the latest victim. He essayed to manage the animal but yesterday, and the poor man fared rather badly."

"He is a beast of fine discretion," was the somewhat ambiguous comment of Master Jack.

"My mother," she continued, ignoring Jack's remark, "is in mortal fear lest I intend to use him for my own mount—which was my original intention—and declares if I do not dispose of him immediately, or if I permit another man to endanger his life, she will complain of me to the society for the prevention of cruelty to animals. Whether she feels that the animal or the men have been abused, is not quite clear. Therefore, Mr. Waldron, I shall not trouble you, or permit you to endanger your

young life in attempting to curb the spirits of my fractious steed—unless," she hesitated, seemingly reluctant to accept as final the idea of parting with the animal, "you are possessed of a wild desire to try your skill, in which case I may be able to obtain my mother's consent to offer one more sacrifice."

"I am not conscious of possessing just such a wild or uncontrollable desire," replied Waldron, with indifferent good nature, "yet if you wish to retain the animal I am entirely willing to exert my influence over his fractious spirits."

"I realized that my expression was not tempered with the finest distinction," said Cathalee, with an assumption of seriousness. "I do not believe you capable of possessing a wild desire for anything. You simply take people and things as you find them, utterly indifferent and careless of the particular form they assume. I am curious to know the sort of man that really exists under all this indifference. However, I accept your offer with the modification that you will undertake the task to please me, rather than from any particular desire on your own part, which serves to make the obligation even greater, notwithstanding which, I continue to accept," she laughingly declared, "and you may expect to hear from me before many days. Oh, I am quite serious!" she insisted.

Maude had been a very quiet and interested member of the party, and she promptly expressed the hope that Mr. Waldron would be able to manage the unruly animal; and her eyes, as they regarded the stalwart form by her side, said no less plainly, that she, at least, had no doubt whatever as to the outcome.

"Other bright eyes had wandered from one to the other of the two persons arranging this very questionable proceeding, and at its conclusion, their owner ventured to hope that Mr. Waldron would not permit himself to be injured by the unruly beast. Whereupon that gentleman explained—very seriously and very confidentially, to be sure—that Mrs. Davidge, strange to say, seemed to derive a great deal of pleasure in poking fun at him, and was even then trying her best to make him acknowledge that he was afraid of her old horse, but he would not give her that satisfaction, to all of which that lady felt constrained to gracefully submit, but a certain glance bestowed upon that same gentleman was strongly suggestive of a later accounting.

"Fractious steed, indeed!" laughed Jack Winston. "Don't be alarmed, Sis. Mr. Waldron is only going to put the old nag through a few fancy steps, and perhaps one of these days we shall see Cathy and her venerable steed doing stunts in the center ring. Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, and see the great and only Cathy—"

Time and place are accountable for much, and in the present instance may have had a very material bearing upon the general well-being of a certain young man. This was positively an imposition upon good nature, and a calumny against a youthful steed of bluest blood.

"Jack Winston!" exclaimed the sadly maligned young woman, under stress of righteous indignation. "I am capable of but one fiendish wish at the present moment. That you might be compelled to ride that venerable steed is a retribution I heartily wish you. Venerable! Indeed! The idea! Why, he is only a baby!" All of

which was very confusing to the young miss whose innocent concern for the welfare of her host had precipitated such tragic and conflicting expressions. Anyway, she hoped that Mr. Waldron would not permit the venerable, or baby steed—whichever he might be—to do him harm.

CHAPTER XX

WOMAN MUST CHOOSE

FRIENDSHIP and character—the demands of the one reveal the strength of the other. As fire is the test of clay, so no man may be adjudged friend until he has been tried and not found wanting.

On the following Monday morning while Cathalee was looking hurriedly over her mail she came upon a letter that for the time being dispelled all other thoughts from her mind. She had read but a few words when the brightness gradually faded from her eyes, and her features became sternly, even rigidly set.

"Dearest Cathalee," the letter read, "I cannot rest until I have sent you a note of warning—indeed, I should go immediately to you, were it not that I am leaving town this very afternoon.

"Who could have so cruelly deceived you? Do you —of course you cannot have any idea who the man really is. It seems quite like a dream that he, of all men, should be here in our very midst. My dear, he is a very dangerous man. He is the leader of a band of men as reckless and unscrupulous as himself. He actually had the audacity to defy my father, and to hold up our entire party quite like a highwayman. There

can be no mistake, my dear, as Mr. Herringdon also recognized him beyond the possibility of a doubt. I am sure he recognized us—he could not have failed to do so—and will doubtless be on his guard, as must you, my dear. Mr. Herringdon will give you such other information as time forbids me, and you may trust to his discretion in dealing with the man. I cannot bear to think of what might have happened but for this chance recognition. I shall see you immediately upon my return—in about a week, my dear.

Lovingly yours,

CONSTANCE HILLMAN."

Again she read the letter and more slowly, her eyes seeming to follow the tracing of each little word. The maid came to tell her that her carriage was waiting, but the words fell upon unheeding ears. A few minutes later the maid again looked in but her mistress had not changed her position; she sat staring blankly at the letter. The minutes sped by unheeded; a half hour passed, and she made no movement. She was thinking—thinking as she had never done before. She was at the crossing of the roads, and she must choose for herself—her own womanly instincts must be her guide.

Strong characters seek guidance from within; as they are strong they fear not to trust themselves. Their friendship is not a trivial thing to be influenced by variable winds, nor does the breath of calumny waft it away. Nearly an hour had passed when she suddenly roused herself, and turning to her desk, deliberately penned a brief note.

"Dear Mr. Waldron:

"Saturday is the day—1:30 the hour, which means that you are invited to luncheon. You will meet my mother—a small formality to be observed—after which I may ride with you in the park.

Cordially yours,

CATHALEE DAVIDGE."

Calling the maid, she gave her a few brief instructions, and taking the letter with her she went calmly out to the waiting carriage. She had chosen and she would abide the consequences.

Waldron presented himself at the appointed time and place. He immediately discovered that mother and daughter were as dissimilar as two persons of the same flesh and blood and dwelling beneath the same roof could well be. He also learned that he was *persona non grata* with the mother, and understood that he had been bidden to come simply because it suited Cathalee's purpose, and at best, the mother's acquiescence had been but submissive. The inevitable conceded, nothing remained but to make the best of an uninteresting situation, and to observe certain formalities of which graciousness and hospitality were not the necessary accompaniments. Perforce, ill concealed, were several remarks addressed to the guest adapted with commendable consideration to his understanding, clearly demonstrating that Mrs. Worthington had failed to discern any common ground (indeed it is a grievous error to suggest even the ground as common on which this aristocratic woman might deign to tread) on which she and the stranger might stand. He was from the West, she understood. Had

he never been in New York before? Yes—many years before. "Ah! Indeed!" expressive of resignation and a duty conscientiously performed, for what could possibly avail after such an admission. The man was quite impossible. She knew little of the world outside of her New York, and possessed no inclination whatever to make its acquaintance, while her desire to rub elbows with its denizens was even more remote. Her New York was limited to her own small and select circle, beyond the prescribed limits of which she rarely ventured, and around which she had revolved year after year with the unvarying precision rarely attained by the human mechanism. Scant encouragement and less welcome was the portion of him who sought to enter this charmed circle. Eternal vigilance was the price of its exclusiveness—the indelible stamp of its tensity was apparent upon every feature, the consciousness of its responsibility manifest in every word and act. Had the guest inclined to volubility he might, perhaps, have awakened a keener interest in himself, by explaining that during the "many years before," he had lived not far distant on the same avenue; in fact, had been born in a certain mansion still extant which, if the truth were known, was before the lady herself came to reside on the aristocratic thoroughfare.

Cathalee was easily equal to the necessary formalities of the occasion, and no embarrassing situations were allowed to obtrude themselves, but even her admitted talents and cheery good nature failed to dispel a certain frigidness in the atmosphere, and it is no great hazard to say, that while the luncheon doubtless served its purpose, all were frankly glad when it came to an end.

"Please sir, do not permit anything terrible to happen, I beg of you," said Cathalee, with an air of tragic concern, as clad in a simple and vastly becoming habit she descended the steps. "I have simply been made to feel that I am jeopardizing your young life, and dire responsibility hangs over me."

"Your wishes shall be most consistently and conscientiously observed," he laughed. "I certainly am not seeking a reckless and untimely disposition of myself."

"Might it not be well to make the acquaintance of your mount before assisting me?" she inquired, regarding with some concern the spirited and restless animal that was giving the groom no little trouble to manage.

"The formalities shall be duly observed, I promise you," he said, extending his hand to assist her to mount.

"It would be extremely embarrassing to be compelled to take to the street cars after all," she suggested, rather more ill at ease than she was willing to admit. "Do you know, sir, you have never even inquired what are his faults," she informed him, her mount accomplished.

"That would be taking rather an unfair advantage, would it not? I dare say he will confide in me as our acquaintance progresses."

"Well, really, I don't think I am versed in equine etiquette if it runs along those lines," she laughed. "But judging from his behavior I should say that a heart to heart interview awaits you."

"You might tell me his name and assist the acquaintance to that extent," he lightly replied, stepping along to where the groom was having considerable difficulty with the spirited animal.

"His christening was a marvel of foresight. He bears the black and suggestive appellation of Wizard."

"Certainly prolific of possibilities. Well, old chap, are you as black in equine arts as your color and name suggest?" he affably inquired, laying hold of the bridle and stroking the animal's head and neck, and glancing critically at the restless eyes. "Not such a bad eye. Just a little headstrong—a little spoiled—and a little misunderstanding all around, I guess. After all, you would not be of much account without a will of your own, would you, old fellow?"

"He's werry wishus, sor! He'll give you a dale of truble, if no wurse," the groom hastened to explain, earnestly solicitous lest a false estimate be placed on his charge. "I'll howld him, sor!" he protested, as Waldron would relieve him of further responsibility, "He's a werry bad actor!"

"What is your name?" asked Waldron, looking down at him rather amusedly.

"John, sor!"

"Very well, John, you may trust your charge with me and I will return him to you a better and a wiser animal."

"Its not the baste I'm thinking of sor! Shure, and if he niver cum bark, divil a tare wud John Flanagan wape. Shure he'll cum bark arl right—the divil laves no harrum to his own."

"You have said it, John," laughed Waldron. "On that basis we shall get on very well," which conversation amused Cathalee not a little, but the finer point was lost upon John, who failed to discern humor in any form even remotely associated with this "black baste." John

had seen several men come to grief in their efforts to manage this same animal, and knowing himself from sad experience the temper of the brute, he reluctantly released the bridle to the good-natured stranger, who seemed not to realize the trouble he was making for himself.

Waldron backed Wizard away from the curb, stroking his sleek and shining coat, talking to him with easy familiarity, his every movement indicative of the confidence characteristic of a master and lover of the equine race. To him the horse was endowed with instinct little less than human. Indeed, he had said upon more than one occasion that a good horse was far more companionable than many a man, and as he had spent weeks on the plains and among the hills, a faithful horse his sole companion, the remark might perhaps be regarded as something more than a mere figure of speech. He had broken and ridden horses ranging from the fierce and stubborn thoroughbreds, to the mongrels, even worse, lacking as they do the finer instincts of the truer breeds, and are simply brutes, worse confounded. To him, the breaking and handling a horse was simple play, and the average representative of the equine race was little more than a child in his hands. So it was not strange that he had hardly given a serious thought to the task before him, but rather, looked upon Wizard merely as a spoiled child in need of a little judicious correction.

"I am not surprised that you are reluctant to part with him," he said, stepping back and regarding the animal with unfeigned admiration. "He is certainly a beauty."

"Thank you, sir!" she replied, with prettily feigned seriousness. "I believe this is the first real interest, or

anything approaching enthusiasm, that I have seen you manifest. Wizard, you are developing possibilities—you have accomplished more than your mistress in much less time," she gaily informed that equine beauty. The admiration, however, was clearly on the one side, as Wizard glared wildly and suspiciously at his fond admirer, and in various ways expressed an enthusiastic desire to free himself from that gentleman's presence.

The time had now arrived to proceed with the business in hand. The man prepared to mount, but was immediately made aware of an exceedingly well-developed and no less undesirable propensity on the part of the animal. Away went Wizard with a bound, and from a less strong arm would have freed himself. As it was, his antic was merely indulged for the moment, a vice-like grip placed on the reins just back of the bits exerting no gentle pressure on the tender mouth, quickly bringing him to terms, and convincing his equine understanding of the futility of attempting to escape.

"You see, sir, his conduct leaves something to be desired," said Cathalee. "I fear you will find him rather difficult. That is really his worst fault—in other respects his conception of the proprieties is fairly commendable, I believe."

The animal's fiery spirit was now thoroughly aroused. His eyes flashed fire, and he trembled in every limb; he stamped his feet, tossed his head, angrily champed his bits flicking bits of foam about, and in all respects behaved very badly for a well-bred horse—or perhaps very properly for one of his aristocratic breeding.

The movements of the man were now more brisk and businesslike. Formalities had been duly observed, and

the real question of supremacy of man or beast would now be settled promptly and conclusively. Stroking the arching neck, and running his hand over the shapely shoulder on which the veins stood out like animated cords, he arranged the stirrup to his liking, and taking a short hold on the nearest rein, Wizard was suddenly made to feel the heavy hand of retribution. With no gentle movement the pretty head was brought around almost to the limits prescribed by nature, and before released—without which he could not well repeat his previous performance—the man was in the saddle. It would be difficult to say which was the more surprised —the lady sitting on yonder horse, or the Wizard. This was outrageous and unaccustomed treatment—the pretty and arching neck had received a shameful wrench. Such ignominy must be avenged at once. He obeyed his animal instinct, and made a wild plunge—that was his evident intent—but again was he at a disadvantage to the extent that his move was anticipated, and around came that shapely head again, but well down, and his Wizardship narrowly escaped being brought humbly to his knees from the impetus so quickly checked. Very well! As he was not permitted to go his own way, he would go the way his head was turned—with a vengeance. He received encouragement entirely unexpected, and after making several revolutions suddenly discovered that he was merely chasing his own tail which, despite his most frantic efforts, was as far removed as in the beginning, all of which, to an animal of his spirit was an exceedingly mortifying not to say monotonous proceeding. Moreover, he was a little dizzy, a little confused, and decidedly uncertain of things in general, except that the

way of the transgressor—at least for a horse—in the hands of this rough man was closely allied with a cramped neck, a very uncomfortable mouth, and a pronounced inability to follow his own inclinations; and as he was not such a very bad Wizard after all, he allowed himself to be guided alongside his more sedate stable companion, admitting his defeat like the sensible fellow he was, and the two ambled amiably down the Avenue.

"Well!" exclaimed Cathalee, expressing surprise little short of incredulity, "however did you manage? I have certainly missed something—I did not even see how it happened. I fancy Wizard has not even yet recovered from the shock—poor fellow—he seems quite dazed," she said, glancing sympathetically at her pet. "When you have a thing to do you stand not upon the order of doing, but do—don't you? I think on the whole I rather like your way, but I don't believe I quite understand you," she told her companion, regarding him with thoughtful interest.

"He is not vicious," said Waldron, apparently unconscious of the very pretty compliment paid him. "High spirited and a trifle headstrong. There is a deal of human nature in a horse. Give him his head once, and he expects it the next time, and will fight for it—and a little more. Natural—the man does the same. We put a bridle on the horse, jerk his head, twist his mouth, and perhaps beat him—a further proof of our very superior intelligence—and the animal eventually reflects the character of the man—some horses resemble asses. The man, unfortunately, is allowed to pursue an indis-

criminate career, and lowers not only the standard of his own, but the equine race as well."

"Help! Help!" exclaimed Cathalee. "What terrible —is it philosophy, or heresy? The sins of the animal are surely visited on his mistress—there is no other way out of it," she laughingly declared. "And quite right, too, I must admit on reflection, although the idea had never occurred to me. When he came into my possession he was fairly well mannered, but gradually developed those disagreeable characteristics, and became worse and worse after each man attempted to manage him. He just *knew* he was master, and simply reveled in the consciousness of his equine superiority, until—well, until he made the acquaintance of a certain man—and that man, if I mistake not," turning a suspicious glance upon her companion, "is very much inclined to apply the same methods to man and beast."

CHAPTER XXI

MAN'S REGENERATION

"DO not flatter yourself, sir, that all this marked attention is a tribute to your good looks and magnificent physique," said Cathalee, with a sly glance at her companion after several carriages had passed, and the occupants, nodding recognition to her, had turned their attention to her escort.

"Listen! You shall know how very conceited I can be upon occasion—even to your detraction," she told him, with great good humor. "You must know that I ride in the park with very few gentlemen. My mother has very decided ideas as to the proprieties involved, and the sudden appearance of a handsome stranger," making him a pretty salute, "as my escort, naturally excites some interest—not to say curiosity. I hope you are fully conscious, sir, of the very great favor you are supposed to be enjoying at the present moment. Now have I not fairly outdone myself?" she demanded, with engaging frankness.

"I fear that I have only succeeded in confusing you," she continued, more seriously. "You are trying to reconcile my mother's permission to ride with you with her general attitude, are you not? Please do not try. I may as well tell you in the beginning they are quite irreconcilable."

"Please to define my responsibility. Incidentally, of what conspicuous misdemeanor have I been guilty?" he inquired, but apparently not greatly disturbed.

"I shall be perfectly frank. My mother does not approve of you in the least. Not because of anything you have done—her seal of disapproval was placed upon you in advance—but my acquaintance with you. You may trace your ancestry back to Cæsar's time; you may possess wealth untold; you may be a member of an ultra exclusive set in some quarter of the globe; but as you have not confessed to any of these possibilities or their kindred my mother immediately assumes the lack of them. To me such things are intensely shallow. To be sure, I do not object to a well-defined position in society; nor do I consider an ancient lineage a misfortune; and one may suffer wealth with complacency. My objection is to the homage and adulation paid to these deities—they are little less in the estimation of many—and to the desire to cast into outer darkness those who chance not to possess a heritage of something or other for which they were in no way responsible. I find interesting people in all stations, and the reverse is no less true; but if the innate man or woman appeals to me all else is secondary."

"Yours is hardly the universal standard," he said, regarding his companion with interest.

"My mother cannot understand this affair to-day. I do not in the least mind saying that I like your company —else why be here. You do not annoy me by making love or saying ridiculous things. You have no hobbies to bore me into little bits. Nor do you tell me of your heart conquests, soul yearnings, escapades in general,

of which as a class I am heartily tired. On the other hand, you may be a very bad man, as I know very little about you, but I am perfectly willing to take the chances. I certainly know you for a very brave man; that you have a generous and kindly heart I also know, and after that I do not believe that you can be very bad, and—well, you have broken my horse, for which I am very much obliged," she laughingly declared.

Life and vigor were in the very atmosphere this golden autumn day and these two young persons in the robustness of their matured youth breathed it and were made light of heart and strong in mind and body. Nor was the same boon denied to the lesser of God's creatures and the spirits of their noble servants beat in close accord. Those arching necks and prancing steps and snapping eyes told no less plainly than that joyous voice or that hearty laugh of the keen enjoyment of man and beast.

"That is Mr. Burrows, the great financier," she told him, as a victoria of conspicuous elegance flashed past containing, as was evident from the merest glance, two opposing elements of humanity. An exceedingly portly gentleman was sitting rigidly erect and well forward, his conspicuously large hands resting on a massive gold-headed cane, his gaze of scowling intensity directed steadily before him. Reclining far back behind her lord and master was a frail and diminutive creature upon whom the vicissitudes of life had weighed too heavily, and the slight form had slowly shrunk within itself until its flickering light seemed in imminent danger of being snuffed out by the first fair wind. "I am told that he makes thousands of dollars every day. Is it really

possible? I have much sympathy for her, poor soul! She seems so utterly and helplessly oppressed by the sense of his overpowering personality that I sometimes think she would be meekly grateful if a merciful Father might take her away, and have done at once what man is accomplishing by degrees."

And thus the two men who were destined before many days to make history in the world of finance were met for one brief instant. Unknown and unheeded on the one side; barely known and scanned with one quick imperturbable glance on the other.

"I believe he is looked upon as one of the bright and shining examples of the successful man of to-day," she continued. "Perhaps you know him—by reputation?"

"By reputation—yes."

"It seems to me, if I were a man—please note a woman's logic—I should feel it incumbent upon me to guard my reputation rather more zealously than he seems to deem it necessary."

"In other words, you would be a man first,—"

"And last," she interposed. "I should feel that anything less was a misuse and abuse of the powers and purpose of my existence. However, that is only a woman's idea; I dare say if I were a man I should take quite another view of the matter—women are so very illogical."

"Bertie Holly!" she suddenly exclaimed, as they made an abrupt turn in the road, and an effeminate youth perched high on a jiggly cart whisked past with flourish of whip, doff of cap, and a reckless disregard for the diminutive beast pegging away for dear life, his short dumpy legs making a continuous rat-ta-tat on the hard

roadway. "I could not imagine what was coming," she laughed, with a sigh of relief, "and to think it was only Bertie. Bertie is really very useful in his own peculiar way. He seems never so happy as when pouring tea for a party of ladies. Whether because of his particular fondness for our sex, or because he fancies himself more the man, as sole representative of his own, I have never been able to discover. Bertie is a product of our effete civilization—he would hardly thrive in your strenuous country?"

"He would hardly be considered indigenous to the soil. Such rare exotics seldom thrive in the transplanting."

"I fancied as much," she said, laughing softly. "I was curious to know the particular form your expression would take."

"There is a strange and lamentable divergence from the divinely endowed man to the individual evolved by contact with his fellows," he briefly observed.

"Oh, me!" she sighed, as a tightly closed brougham rolled sedately past permitting a momentary glimpse of a solitary figure muffled almost out of sight in furs. "How can one put oneself into such close confinement this lovely day? That poor creature is afflicted with what I am pleased to term the sensitive habit. She possesses a morbid idea that the entire social world is lying awake nights plotting her undoing entirely oblivious of the fact that she is simply a slave to her own jealousies and selfishness. Ah, me! What afflictions we poor mortals do put upon ourselves."

Several times he had surprised a look of curious inquiry directed upon him by his companion which he

was at a loss to interpret. "I'll confess," she laughed, when again caught in the act. "I have simply been trying to discover whether you are interested in these side lights I have been throwing upon your fellow creatures or—"

"If I am satiated with civilization?"

"Yes—certain phases of it—since you are pleased to place it in that way. I do not think you much in sympathy with the idiosyncrasies of our much lauded society."

"I confess my inability to take them altogether seriously," he was compelled to admit.

"I thought so!" she laughingly exclaimed. "I am well aware that yours is quite a different standard. I confess I am rather curious to know more of that peculiar standard by which you gauge yourself and your fellows—and I shall not be quite satisfied until I do."

"I fear you will find my regeneration rather a difficult task. I have been too long removed from the influence of civilization to be at once made over."

"I shall find it very interesting—of that I am quite convinced. I have strong suspicions that latent possibilities—perhaps very interesting possibilities—may lie concealed beneath that coolly indifferent exterior," she declared, with interesting frankness.

"Now there is a man whom I consider truly unfortunate," she said, with an assumption of seriousness, as a sorrel charger loped past bearing the individual in question. "The poor man is really anxious to take unto himself a wife, but to date, his quest for the particular woman upon whom he can bestow his heart's affections has met with dire failure. No, he seems not unduly fastidious—even admits that he does not expect perfection.

He is at a loss to understand why we, as a sex, do not find it to our advantage to be less artificial. Plainly, why we persist in climbing to heights beyond our power to maintain, only to deliberately cast ourselves down. He frankly propounded the query to me, and I suggested that he try the effect upon his sensibilities of less ecstatic creatures—the more common fibre—the supposition, of course, that the mean fall would be less and the resultant disparity materially modified. The suggestion met with even heartier approval than I could have properly anticipated and I fancied that I detected a certain something which I promptly nipped in its incipiency, by declaring my own irresponsibility and general unworthiness of the trust. I could not possibly appreciate such a very literal interpretation of my suggestion. One need not necessarily suffer crucifixion to prove one's theory—need one?"

"Man's vagaries and woman's theories afford a broad field for speculation," was the noncommittal reply.

"At last!" she exultantly exclaimed when, after persistent probing and circumvention she had succeeded in extracting a desired bit of information. "Now I have the key to the situation and I shall proceed to put the parts together and draw my own conclusions."

"I refuse to be responsible for conclusions drawn from such a source," he protested, good naturedly.

"Of course you do! But what is one to do when you are approachable only on the installment plan—when one is more curious than polite?"

"Still, it is palpably unfair to thrust conclusions upon one; misconception, not to say injustice, may result."

"The only alternative is a full and free confession

when I wish to know things, otherwise I shall simply be compelled to draw my own conclusions, and I may—I dare say I shall—think very badly of you. So, sir, beware!—your reputation is at stake."

"Or rather, hangs upon a woman's fancy—rather a slender thread, I fear."

"Indeed, yes," she laughed. "I positively would not dare tell you all the things I think of you even now," she recklessly declared, and the sudden consciousness of the literal truth of the assertion caused her to blush furiously and to quickly change the subject.

"There now!" she laughed, with feminine exultation. "There is the other side of matrimonial felicity—a veritable triumph of the weaker sex by force of will and avoirdupois," as a carriage drawn by a dashing pair of bays whirled past, the woman in this instance being the dominant power.

"That couple will certainly bring me to grief some day. I have not the least control over myself whenever they appear upon the scene. One is never prepared for their coming, which perhaps is well. They put in an appearance at odd and uncertain intervals, and before one is aware they have said good-bye and gone or zipped past in their mad race with something or other which seems for ever keeping them at their best paces. You must know that you have looked upon Mrs. and Mr. Hannum—please note the precedence.

"Is it possible? You quite surprise me! Well, then, she bears the more or less enviable distinction of being one of our foremost clubwomen—goes in for reforms, advanced ideas, and I don't know what all. What particular movement has she inaugurated? Sir, you are

most unkind to develop this sudden curiosity. As you insist, I believe that she has not as yet achieved greatness outside her own particular coterie of followers, but she possesses marvelous ideas which in time are bound to be accorded due recognition. At least that is the oft repeated assertion—in the meantime we are all very patient. She is a very busy woman but very considerately devotes Saturday afternoons to her husband. The implicit faith of the little man in her whom he loves, honors, and obeys, and regards, as I am inclined to think, as mightier than his maker, is beautiful to behold. The marriage service should certainly have been reversed to meet the exigencies of their union. The Major holds some rather strenuous views on this particular subject —rather beyond my depth I fear. However, should you desire to pursue the subject further I dare say he will unbosom himself for your edification."

This couple and others of like character receive but little consideration from the old Major. But the Major, as is well understood, retains some of his old-fashioned ideas, among which is the homely belief that a man should be a man, and a woman a woman—no more, no less—and declares with characteristic vehemence, "Egad! what can you do with a woman who won't be a woman, and a man who can't be a man? I say marry 'em—*marry 'em!* Keep 'em together and they'll do no harm to the rest of the race. They're satisfied and no one begrudges them their possessions. Progeny? *Progeny?* Bah!" and the old fellow looks unutterable disgust and commiseration.

From one subject to another she gaily flitted, rivalling even the birds in the air in her strange and sudden

flights of thought and speech. Constraint she had flung aside as a useless encumbrance. She was effervescing with the joy of living; she was finding happiness in a companionship such as she had never known before—a wild delirious happiness of which she heeded not the meaning. It spoke from her lips; it shone in her eyes; it rang in her voice; it echoed in her silvery laugh; it radiated from her whole being. Life was only just beginning. Ah! what a wondrous thing is life—how good —how sweet—how precious—how glorious a thing is living when the flood gates of love are suddenly flung wide apart and the great, surging, throbbing torrent finds entrance into hearts that are hungry for its coming. Love lives in all the things of earth! Love throbs in the very atmosphere! She was learning its mystic lore and revelling in its intoxication—the awakening was for the morrow.

"Do you think me terribly bad?" she suddenly demanded of her companion, "because I do," answering her own query. "I should not say such things. Oh, yes! they are unkind—only I don't intend them that way. I am simply outdoing myself to-day, but I am going to be very good now."

"I trust my regeneration is not being accomplished at too great a sacrifice," he very considerately suggested.

"Oh, no!" she laughed. "I quite enjoy it even if I do offer an occasional apology for myself. You may consider this the first of the series in your course of regeneration."

Wizard's behavior for the most part had been fairly commendable. To be sure he had made several attempts to indulge his restless and high-strung spirits and only

prompt and decisive action on the part of his rider had forestalled an impromptu cross-country run or two. On the whole, horse and rider had arrived at a fairly good understanding when they drew up in front of the house at the conclusion of the ride. "There, John, you will find your charge a little more tractable and amenable to reason," said Waldron, as he handed Wizard over to the groom who expressed honest satisfaction that no "harrum" had been done.

"I possessed a well-defined intention of asking you to call an evening next week," said Cathalee, "but I fear that I have talked you into a state of depression from which you are too pleased to be delivered to again surrender yourself. However, if you feel equal to the ordeal you may come and see me Thursday evening. Very well—Thursday evening. And believe me, sir, you have done Wizard and his mistress a very great service for which they are truly grateful—at least one is, and the other has not expressed himself to the contrary."

CHAPTER XXII

"ONLY A MAN!"

"YOUR coming this evening is little less than an act of mercy," she told him, with gracious warmth of greeting, as she led the way into a small and cosy room off the hall where a cheerful fire blazed in the grate. "I have been sitting here all alone thinking the gloomiest thoughts that a morbid mind could well conceive, and as a result, I am quite out of conceit with myself."

The thought might have occurred to the guest that the mood of his fair hostess and her environments were not in full accord, for surely if physical comforts were conducive to peace of mind none should be happier or more content than she.

"You may take that easy chair—I know you have designs upon it; besides, I arranged it for you, and one for myself on this side of the grate," she told him, with simple frankness. "I shall venture to hope that you may be very comfortable, and honestly glad you came, and—you may smoke."

"This is rank heresy. Please to remember that it is my re-generation that you have undertaken."

"Quite right. Still, you may smoke—you are the master of your destiny after all is said and done."

"Why not concede as much for yourself? Or is it a

prerogative of your sex to be creatures of circumstance and—moods?"

"I presume you think it strange that I should be other than perfectly happy, unless you chance to be philosophically inclined, in which case you will understand that one may possess all the creature comforts, yet lack the one great essential—I know not what it may be—without which one may never find contentment. I am given to this sort of thing occasionally, and I am glad that you chanced to find me in such a mood. Perhaps you can diagnose my weakness, and suggest a remedy. Besides, you will know that I can be serious upon occasion, and am not always the rattle-brained creature you have just cause to believe me."

"I fear I am but a poor philosopher."

"I am not so sure. I have an idea that you would underrate yourself, and permit others to do the same, so little do you concern yourself with many things which seem to be the aim and object of most men. I am at a loss to understand whether it is indifference, pure and simple, or a self-contained assurance of strength and ability to cope with the world, regardless."

"I fear our subjects have become confused."

"I am inclined to think that I have yet to make the acquaintance of the real man," she continued, apparently unconscious of his remark, "although if I mistake not, I saw him that terrible night out in the mountains, and again—just a fleeting glimpse—when he took my horse in hand and quietly but firmly broke his stubborn will, as he would have broken his pretty neck or some portion of his anatomy, had he not obeyed him. On the whole, I rather like obscure possibilities which

may pop out at any moment and prove intensely interesting."

"All of which is a lamentable fall from a very interesting to a very commonplace subject. This mood—has it taken wings already?" he inquired, with kindly interest.

"Very well, sir, since you insist upon returning to my moody self, the responsibility be on your head. I believe I have not told you that much of my time is given to charity work. Know then, that I am interested in the general work, and one little haven of rest is entirely dependent upon me for its sustenance. I took up this work originally, I fancy, because I was fitted for little else. A mere passive existence never appealed to me. Society, very well in its way, eventually became stupid and inane, and a continued existence without definite purpose seemed as unwarrantable as undesirable. The stage was a possibility, but hardly a probability, my mother holding the balance of power. Business in any form was prohibited for various reasons. So charity seemed the most promising field for my endeavors. Nothing could tempt me to go back to my old life of aimless irresponsibility. I merely existed then. Now I live —live in the consciousness that, after all, I am of some use among the great mass of human beings of which I am one, and not quite the least. I hope you follow me, otherwise I must seem deplorably stupid."

"You are perfectly clear and logical—and interesting," he assured her.

"Well, then," she continued, thus encouraged, "I throw open my house each year and give a sort of something —never quite the same in name, and the name is fre-

quently a misnomer. The essential features, however, are maintained with commendable persistency, and consist primarily and principally, in compelling everybody to stand and deliver—hands up—frankly and cordially. I provide something in the way of entertainment, music for dancing, and refreshments. All my friends take tickets, and subscribe various amounts according to the state of the market they tell me—their extravagance and dissipations, they don't tell me—all of which have to be reckoned with before charity. They are really very generous, although some, I fear, contribute under inward protest and outward compulsion. I tell them that I am their good angel, and literally shower blessings upon them in thus giving them an opportunity to perform a generous and kindly act for so worthy a cause. I do not think that they all quite agree with me, and some would doubtless prefer to bargain for their own blessings and more than likely consider me a nuisance. I certainly dispense my blessings with a generous hand but as it is all for a worthy cause my conscience suffers not at all. By the way, the affair this year takes place in two weeks—you are invited, please to remember. I shall see that you are duly and formally reminded. Please also to remember that excuses don't go upon this particular occasion—death alone cancels the obligation.

"All of which," she continued, after a short pause to note the effect upon her guest of this very positive declaration, "is apropos of telling you how I chanced to be in my present mood. For the most part my excessive spirits and abundant good health enable me to perform my work with little or no embarrassment, and only occasionally do I lose control of myself and become—

well, moody. At such times, however, I am utterly unable to throw off the feeling of depression that comes over me and I am only less miserable than the unfortunates themselves."

"I understand—I quite understand," he said, as she paused a moment.

"Oh, you men! You men! What misery you cause! I do not mean that you are responsible for all, but in the great majority of cases the beginning may be traced to you. Your very footsteps mark the way of sin, misery, and death, in the mutilated forms and living hells you leave behind. What does it all mean? What excuse do you offer yourselves? What are your prayers? What do you—what can you expect? How dare you even pray?"

"Prayers—too many prayers—are but the rites of the savage adapted to the exigencies of his civilized brother. The letter and not the spirit escaped the evolution."

"What God—what conception of a Deity—can you men possess that permits you to bring such misery—such pitiable miserable misery—into the world? Have you no better—no loftier conception of a Deity than the savage? Is your God of no finer parts than his hideous monstrosity? Do you, too, think to purchase immunity from the righteous wrath of your God by dropping reluctant tribute into the temple plate, even as the unlettered savage casts burnt offerings at the shrine of his grinning joss, congratulating yourself that the reckoning is paid in full, and that your ill-gotten gold is a recompense for the bodies you have maimed, the hearts you have broken, and the lives you have destroyed?

Tell me, pray, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Guilty, I fear—guilty without extenuating circumstances."

"Ah, yes, guilty! We know that—but why? Why are men so cruel—so selfish—so unrighteous?"

"Unfortunately the essentials of an alibi for my sex are sadly lacking. Your arraignment is as justified as it is scathing—more could not well be said. Moreover, your queries involve some of the great problems of life, and I fear I am too little competent to adjust those profound matters to your satisfaction. Moreover, again—"

"I don't want any more 'moreovers'," she petulantly interrupted. "Please be serious—I am, quite. I don't like you to say sarcastic things when I am in earnest, and I fear you are terribly capable."

"The general subject is prolific of countless theories. We should doubtless fail to agree and fall to arguing; result, bad tempers and dissolution of friendship. Discretion is not the least of wisdom."

"Please don't," she protested. "I am not compelled to agree with you, and may not, as you suggest. Nevertheless I should like to know your ideas. Your life has been so radically different from that of the men I know, it is only fair to assume that you possess ideas considerably at variance with theirs as well."

"Man offers little novelty for introspection; he is a too well thumbed volume to afford new sensations," he briefly observed, apparently not inclined to be drawn into argument.

"Besides," she continued, with engaging frankness, "I really wish to know more about you—your real self.

There is something which persists in eluding me—something of which I am intensely conscious at times, yet am unable to explain to my satisfaction—my curiosity is quite aroused, you see."

"The situation is rapidly becoming involved. Curiosity—a woman's curiosity is not to be lightly regarded."

"Nor ignored," she declared very positively. "And now you are going to be very civil and tell me how you came to be so big and strong; why you are so indifferent to things and people; how you know so many things you are not supposed to know anything about; and—and who you really are," she told him, with a directness of purpose not to be mistaken.

"I fear I shall have considerable difficulty in extricating myself from the mass of contradictions in which I find myself," he replied, quietly amused at the frank avowal which had come at last.

"You must not laugh at me. You must know that I am not prompted by mere idle curiosity, but by an honest and sincere desire to know more about you and your life from your own lips," she earnestly protested.

"What you ask is no more than is justly due you," he told her, more seriously, after an interval of quiet contemplation of the flames, "and I will gladly tell you anything that can be of any possible interest to you. I hardly know where to begin," he said, very simply, "but if there be anything of interest in my life, it must necessarily date from my advent into the Western country, as my career up to that time differed not materially from that of the average New York youth."

"Ah!" she softly sighed.

"I had completed but a small portion of my university course when the loss of both my parents—one following the other in quick succession—and the further loss of all my worldly possessions, threw me upon my own resources. For the first time I was made to feel the heavy hand of misfortune, and not a few were the rough edges and sharp corners I ran against in making the acquaintance of that new world to which I almost immediately betook myself. In those troublous times was laid the foundation of such character as I possess—a process which meant the making or the breaking of the youth.

"This new country was a never failing source of interest and wonderment to my young mind, and many lonely hours in the saddle, on the trail, and in the quiet of the night, were spent in silent contemplation of its wondrous beauties and awe-inspiring mysteries. The marvelous mountain ranges raising their heads high into the clouds with majestic and appalling grandeur, held for me a peculiar fascination. And when from some high peak I gazed into boundless space in any direction my eyes chanced to roam but to discern new wonders limited only by the range of my own small vision, a great awe and veneration would steal into my soul—a mute tribute to the wondrous greatness of which I was the merest atom. Instead of passing from my mind as these thoughts and scenes became more familiar, my mentalities began to expand, and grow richer and stronger in the contemplation of these wonderful works of nature, and the secret processes by which she wrought in her various kingdoms. The relation of man to these great laws was a never-ending source of interest to me,

and in this untrammelled life I came into close communion with primitive nature, and seemed to breathe and absorb the simple truths which had been denied me in the artificial life from which I had lately emerged."

"Yes—yes!" she gently breathed.

"By degrees the littleness and narrowness of my early life dropped away. The countless envies, cravings, passions, jealousies and strivings, which I had once looked upon as co-existent with life, disappeared one after the other, and in their stead came a depth and breadth of thought, a health and strength of mind and body as free and untrammelled from the confines of my earlier existence as the very air I breathed. Have I taken up the particular thread of interest to you?" he paused to inquire. "Please be frank, as I seek only to gratify your desires."

"Ah, yes! Those are the things above all others I would know," she impulsively declared. "I begin to see—to understand. Please go on."

"Man possesses possibilities of which he has little conception, and even less understanding, and it is only occasionally, perhaps by the merest chance, that he catches even a passing glimpse of his real self—the self he persists in hiding even from himself. I do not know that I am altogether clear. Perhaps I can give a stronger point to my meaning through the medium of two incidents which came under my notice not long since. Each incident is more eloquent, more comprehensive, more convincing of the truth than volumes which might be written to prove or disprove the same assertion. Do you mind if I walk? I am more accustomed to keeping pace with my thoughts—this inactivity is demoralizing."

"Indeed, no! Take the floor by all means. I fear you are much too comfortable to be long interesting. We are an unfortunate lot," she sighed, "we make a man comfortable, and he falls asleep on our hands; we neglect his comfort and he stops at his club. Please to remember, sir, that you have a very interested listener."

"Life in the mining camps and frontier towns of the West affords little in the way of amusement, and the advent of an itinerant Uncle Tom's Cabin Company is hailed as the event of the theatrical season. On such an eventful occasion occurred one of the incidents to which I refer. This particular company was neither better nor worse than others of its kind, which is equivalent to saying that it was pretty bad; yet they serve a certain and distinct purpose. At some stage of the proceedings —I was paying little heed to what was transpiring on the stage, but you must know that every loyal citizen owes it to himself not less than to the community at large to be present upon these auspicious occasions—a girl, as uncouth and uninteresting as may well be conceived, slouched out upon the stage. As she came into the uncertain glimmer of the tallow footlights, she approached dangerously near the ludicrous—in fact, she quite arrived. She held a battered old cornet in one hand, drew the back of the other across her mouth, grotesquely distorted her begrimed features, stood upon first one foot and then the other, the while she contemplated her audience with manifest discomfiture. The old horn under most favorable conditions seemed capable of emitting little more than a few wheezy tones, and an already afflicted audience resigned itself to suffer further inflictions at the hands of this grotesque indi-

vidual. She had hardly sounded the first note, however, before the audience was made aware that too hasty judgment had been accorded. She played several familiar airs creative of interest on the part of her auditors, gradually developing into manifest enthusiasm as she proceeded, and when, with a grand flourish of clarion tones and martial strains, she swung into the grand old Star Spangled Banner, she seemed to strike an answering chord in every breast, which reverberated again and again throughout each human organism, and communicated itself to the very atmosphere. In an instant the rough little audience was in transports of joy, and when she finally concluded her performance with Home Sweet Home, every man, woman and child was under the magic spell of her song—joy was unconfined. Grizzled old miners grasped hands and hugged one another like long lost brothers under the influence of this sudden outpouring of spirit, and tears rolled down rough and hardened faces long since strangers to such emotions. The few who possessed wives became suddenly conscious of a greater appreciation for their helpmates. Children were grasped in strong arms and held aloft, and various other antics indulged which could only be performed by human beings under stress of a strong innate volition.

"It was good to see—more—it was grand and glorious, and never to be forgotten. It was not a mere demonstration of rough and uncouth men and women—pioneers and wanderers in that wild country who chanced to be amused—it was the real man and woman within—the spirit of nature, of God—the same that is within you and me, suddenly awakened without volition of the individual by the clarion tones and sweet refrains. It

mattered not whence came those sounds. That they were blown through a battered horn by a freak of a girl possessed no meaning. It was the song they sang that spoke to the man within, and souls burst forth in quick response and glad acclaim, freed from the bondage of the sordid, the artificial, and attuned for the time to the inspiration of love and fraternal spirit—the real—the true—the natural."

"Ah, yes!" she impulsively exclaimed, in full accord with the spirit of the incident. "It was—it must have been grand and glorious! It was good to catch even a passing glimpse of real men and women. And how well you tell it—I can fancy it all."

"For days after, the effect upon the dwellers of the little hamlet was manifest. Hearts were lighter and work seemed less irksome. Whistle and song were in the very air. Hearty good will rang in the salutations of man to his fellows. Even the sun seemed to cast a softer and a warmer and brighter glow on old earth. The cornet girl had gone her way, but the joy of her song still lingered in the hearts of men.

"The other incident. Some weeks later a revivalist came to the camp. Meetings were held and a religious fervor was stimulated according to prescribed forms. The exhortations continued with unabated vigor for a week or more. Converts were made, others interested, excited or frenzied to varying degrees. Doubt and anxiety were soon depicted upon the features of young and old who were identified with the movement. There was no whistle and song, or hearty laugh and passing joke. Hearts were heavy and tense. The spring of natural and joyous spirit had been dammed at its very

fount, and eternal damnation awaited those unfortunates who refused to accept in blind faith the bigoted and blasphemous doctrine of pagan superstition and idolatry —the sole salvation of the children of a wise and beneficent Creator. The vain reasoning—the conflict of hope and despair was pitiful to behold. There was nothing tangible—nothing real. No inner consciousness pointed the way—nothing appealed to the self within. All was forced and unnatural—everything dark and mysterious. One small child—poor soul—took her religion so seriously that her sleeping as well as her waking hours were given over to piteous lamentations. Her parents simplified matters somewhat by withdrawing from the movement; they might be willing to suffer themselves, but could not believe it their duty or even their privilege to torment their child.

"Note the difference. Which was the true—which was the false? Which was the natural—which was the artificial? Which was common sense—which should never be lost sight of—and which was devoid of sense? The spirit of life, of love—the great universal spirit—should be allowed a free and natural expression in every human being; anything less is a flagrant perversion of the primary essentials of human existence. Every living thing abides the law of its creation except man, who persistently refuses to conform to the law of his being, but insists upon trying to improve, and only succeeds in surrounding with doubt, confusion, and darkness as he steps beyond that which he knows and theorizes upon that which he does not know, and moreover, is not essential that he should know. A homely simile, but entirely true in all respects, and I trust clearly

illustrative of the ideas I have endeavored to express."

"Clear, indeed! It has driven home a no less homely truth. It is true—undeniably true—that we confuse ourselves with endless problems and perplexities beyond our power to comprehend when, if we did but know, the simple—the natural of our being—is all sufficient for our requirements if we but gave it an opportunity for a full and free expression. Shall we ever become masters of ourselves—of our destinies?" she sighed, despairingly.

"Yes, we shall become masters of our destinies when we work as hard and as conscientiously to develop those same innate possibilities as we now labor to pervert and to stultify them. When we realize that there is a higher law than the will of man; that there is a greater victory than the triumph of one human being over another; that there is no superiority of sex, but that each has its own part to perform in the great universal plan, then shall we have begun the development of the real man, and to the extent we succeed shall we become masters of ourselves and our destinies. Man's education has put him in bondage to the almighty dollar—he is the expression of his social condition rather than his manhood. His higher faculties, of which he is hardly conscious, have been sacrificed to unnatural ambitions, and to the gratification of appetites and passions of his own cultivation—he is but the anomaly of his real self. Bitter as are his experiences, and as flagrant as are his violations of law and order, he pauses not to heed the lesson, but bitterly bewails God's inhumanity to man, and rushes madly on to his inglorious end. He is the same old man, with the same old appetite, and he would evade his responsibilities in the same old way. To woman—long-

suffering, patient, gentle woman—all honor, all praise is due for the restraining influence she exerts over the erring partner of her existence, and to her will eventually come humanity's greater blessing when her voice of piteous protest is heeded, and she is permitted to lead the way to a better and a truer life—the rightful heritage of every one of her children."

All unconscious of her attitude of pretty, pensive interest; unconscious of the dancing lights and shadows playing upon her sweet, serious face, anon leaping higher and making mystic signs and passes above her shapely head; unconscious of all save the man pacing slowly back and forth whose habitual indifference had gradually disappeared since first he began to speak, and in its stead had come an irresistible strength of thought and speech telling her no less plainly than his words whence came that power of which she was so strangely conscious, and his final words ringing with the force of his manly convictions thrilled her feminine sensibilities almost beyond control, and suffused her fair face with conscious blushes.

"I knew it! I knew you were a good man—I felt it from the very first!" she cried, impulsively. "It is all clear to me now—you are a *man! Only a man!* I was confused by the very simplicity of the problem. Yet is it so strange, after all, when we are surrounded on all sides by human beings so bound and fettered by the artificialties of man-made laws, that we look askance—nay, almost with suspicion—upon one of God's creatures, who chances to be delivered from the errors and weaknesses of his fellows, and lives in the strength and fullness of his divine endowment—his own, his true posses-

sions. Oh! that we might all shake off these burdensome chains and shackles, and be ourselves—just true men and women."

And while the firelight danced and flickered and shed its warmth and glow, a silence fell upon the scene—a silence that spoke more eloquently than tongue or words.

"Ah!" she gently sighed, gazing pensively into the flames, "but you could help me so much—if you would. You are so big, so strong, so good, and you know the world and poor humanity so well. And just to think," slowly diverting her gaze from the flames, and looking up at him with a smile of sweet womanly confession, "just to think, all the while I flattered myself that I was the far more worldly wise. Truly it is my regeneration that should be undertaken. And I think," she said, not without some confusion, her gaze again seeking the flames perhaps to hide the telltale flushes, "I think—indeed, I am quite sure—my curiosity has been appeased at last."

CHAPTER XXIII

ORDERS

EXCITEMENT was once more running high in the little mountain mining town. Notices had been posted at mid-day notifying all whom it might concern that after that day and date all the works operating under the management of The Consolidated Properties would be run on half time until further notice. That night down in the town speculation ran riot as to the meaning of this sudden and unexpected move on the part of the directors of the company. The news spread like wildfire over the mountains and down into the valley and sent horseman after horseman galloping into town raising a cloud of dust which hung over the little community like a funeral pall. On the street corners, in the stores, restaurants, saloons, and down in the dance houses, it was the all absorbing topic of conversation.

Rumors flew thick and fast, some attributing the shutdown to the Eastern Syndicate which had at last secured the advantage it had so long sought. Others suggested a depleted treasury owing to the inability of the company to realize on its stock. Still others told of worked out veins, and a desire on the part of the directors to withhold this knowledge from the public. Whatever might be the difficulty it was generally con-

ceded that any misfortune to Consolidated Properties was a calamity to the community at large as the whole district would once more be at the mercy of its old enemy, the Eastern Syndicate. A gloom as heavy as the dust laden atmosphere had fallen over the little community.

Later in the evening a mysterious rumor began to gain currency that the present embarrassing position of the company might be attributed to a deeply laid plot on the part of the original promoters of the Properties to dispossess the present owners. No one seemed able to trace the rumor to its source, and the very mystery surrounding its origin seemed to give it greater credence.

Other rumors of an equally mysterious origin began to make their appearance reflecting more or less discreditably upon the absent head of the company. Some very heated arguments resulted and bloodshed was averted only from the fact that no one seemed willing to openly stand sponsor for these rumors against a man who was not present to defend himself.

The directors of the company who were on the ground had nothing satisfactory to offer in reply to the oft repeated inquiries and insistent demands as to the meaning of their action, and the silence they steadfastly maintained, even in the face of some very uncomplimentary expressions reflecting upon their management, was ominous in itself. It soon became evident that they could not, or would not, divulge the cause of their strange move, and the conclusion was reluctantly accepted that the company was in financial difficulties, and that one or the other of the powerful moneyed interests had at last secured a death hold on the corporation.

As the night wore on the excitement subsided some-

what, the conservative members of the community sought their rest, and things went their wonted way. Down in shanty-town the fiddles squeaked and the pianos tinkled discordantly. The lights flickered and flared and seemed affected by the general air of depression. Along the main street a confusion of sound was wafted out on the heavy atmosphere. Voices became thick and guttural, and an occasional hoarse laugh or wild yell told plainly that "Old Red Eye" and his rum companion "Forty Rod" were making their presence felt. Now and then one of the rough fellows would break away from his companions, mount his horse and ride away into the night. The dice rattled, the roulette wheels clicked, and the fiddles droned on dismally into the heavy morning hours.

The orders to place the works on reduced time came no less suddenly to the directors than to the townspeople, nor were they any wiser as to the real cause thereof, or of the result to be accomplished by this move. "Down she goes!" Dave had unhesitatingly declared, when he had seen with his own eyes the brief instructions from the President of the company.

"Them's the orders—plain as day," Joe affirmed with equal positiveness, after a prolonged study of the letter.

"There'll be the devil to pay down below," said another of the directors, who chanced to be present, nodding his head towards the town.

"There'll be worse nor him to pay up here, if we don't," said Dave, with deep significance. "Get out the notices, and we'll start her to goin'. Can't set things to bilin' too quick to suit me."

"Might as well touch her off ourselves if there's any blowin' up to be done," said Joe, with commendable resignation. "I reckon somebody may be goin' up along with us—all this ain't jest to amuse us."

"Likely to please some folks a mighty sight, or I ain't much at guessin'," said Dave.

"Tenderfoot and his pals, I 'low you mean?" queried Joe, to which Dave nodded his assent.

"That's the rope he's givin' 'em," said Dave. "All they've got to do now is to tangle theirselves up in it. Tenderfoot don't dare show his head in camp, but he ain't far off, and he'll know what's goin' on soon enough."

"I suspicioned Mister Bill wan't doin' all that thinkin' for nothin', but I 'low' that Tenderfoot business was too much for me. Has to be a hole in a grindstone for me to see through," said Joe.

Accompanying the orders concerning the works was a well defined suggestion that Dave and Joe might feel inclined to pay the East their long anticipated visit. The writer would be able to devote considerable attention to them, and all things considered, the opportunity seemed more favorable than might occur again.

"What's that mean?" demanded Joe.

"Means he wants us to come—them's our orders—couldn't be no plainer," replied Dave, with gruff good nature.

"What do you reckon he wants us back there for? We can't do him no good."

"Dunno. Maybe he wants to get us away from here, seein' as how there ain't much of anything for us to

do jest now except to get into trouble—or talk too much —which ain't no ways unlikely."

"Guess you're right," said Joe, after thinking it over for a while. "That's jest his way of puttin' it—mighty perlite, 'pears to me."

"He's too perlite to say what he thinks—maybe it wouldn't sound so well to us, neither. A hint's good as a kick from some folks."

"Goin'?" queried Joe.

"Sure—nothin' else to do. Orders are orders."

"No use buttin' agin that," Joe solemnly conceded.

The following morning when Dave appeared at the office somewhat later than was his custom, he was in no very amiable frame of mind—strictly speaking, he was mad.

"I 'lowed Mister Bill knew what he was about when he wanted to get us away from here," he growled. "All settled down below that we're dead ones. It's the hardest work I've done in many a day to keep from runnin' foul of some of them chaps that seem to know so much about our business, and are kind of dirty about it, jest 'cause they think we're done for. Strange how some folks get so much courage all to once when they think a feller has lost his grip."

"Don't mean nothin'—not worth botherin' our heads about. Let 'em carry on for a spell—our turn'll come afore long," Joe philosophically observed, evidently thinking it desirable to maintain an equilibrium of tempers.

"Daylight is jest achin' to get into some of their hides. But that don't happen to be part of this 'ere game, as I understand it," said Dave, more calmly.

"Not as I know of. This 'ere is a gentleman's game, and we ain't supposed to do any mixin'. We're jest perlitely asked to do the heavy lookin' on, and I reckon we'd better try our level best to do it, even if it does go agin the grain," said Joe.

"Reckon we had. I 'low Mister Bill has trouble enough without loadin' him up with any of our makin'," Dave agreed.

"Better tell him his invite is taken up, and we'll take the trail soon as we can round up our traps. He's done the handsome askin' a couple of rough old chaps like us to go back there—like enough we'll put the kerbosh on him to the limit," Joe seriously opined.

"Some liberties were taken with Dave's dictation, but as given to the stenographer, it would have read about as follows:

"Old Consolidated is limpin' along on half time 'cordin' to orders. It's took like the itch—no discountin' that. There's plenty to say I told you so—they're allus on hand. Some are afeared maybe you've been caught in a trap. Kinder looks that way to a chap up a tree, so you can't blame 'em so much. They sort of agree that we're broke—plumb worked out—and we ain't sayin' no different. Folks are beginning to wonder what has become of you, and there's some the same as say you were feared to stay and face the music, and lit out—but they ain't sayin' it very hard. The chap as started that yarn must have took to the woods, leastwise he ain't takin' no trouble to make himself known."

"Joe and me don't so much like the idee of diggin' out jest this time, as it kinder looks like we might be runnin' away from somethin' we're afeared of, but we're

obeyin' orders, and ain't askin' no questions. We'll break camp to-morrow night, and you can figger out about the time we're likely to strike old New York. Maybe you'd best be on the watch for us seein' as how we'll be the worst kind of tenderfeet. So long."

"I ain't sayin' so much as I might, but that's enough to give him an idee what's goin' on," Dave explained, when he had finished his dictation.

"More'n likely he knows it now—all he cares to know. Them cusses have been usin' the wires afore now, and tellin' the crowd back there what's goin' on. Mister Bill is watchin' 'em sharp enough to know whether they've bit or not—he ain't waitin' for Uncle Sam to tell him about that," said Joe.

"I reckon. Don't make much difference what we do so long as we keep our mouths shut, and our fingers out of the dough."

About this time another letter relative to the same general subject was speeding on its way to the same destination.

"Dear Mister Bill:

"Your letter was so entirely like a man. Why do men who are really deserving of serious consideration persist in living so entirely within themselves? They make a grave mistake. No human being is or can be, so entirely self-sufficient that he can afford to exclude from his life those who are honestly interested in him and his work—he is simply defying a law that is greater than himself. On the particular subject which interests me the most, you hardly say a word. I don't think it quite fair. However, I refuse to consider myself personally affronted, and for the present shall attribute your

apparent lack of confidence in me to the misfortune—from a man's standpoint—of my birth. Yet this is not altogether a satisfactory explanation, as I had sometime since conceded myself the right of being judged by my own individual worthiness, rather than by the standard of sex. But, alas! Do as she may, a woman never seems able to disassociate herself from the incontrovertible fact that she is a woman, and must suffer the eternal consequences.

"Very well, sir, as you refuse to meet me half way, I shall take the middle ground, and regale you with a brief mention of some of the more conspicuous features of the situation as they appear to a disinterested observer. First and foremost, matters seem to be rapidly approaching a climax—dark forebodings are in the air. Something is about to transpire; what, when, where or how, I haven't the remotest idea, except that it is to be the final act of a drama in which youth and innocence are to go down in defeat unless, perchance, the hero turns the tables on his persecutors at the last moment. Will he?

"Your opponents maintain an air of mystery equal to your own—neither of you intend to be betrayed by a woman. They have become positively hilarious—aggressively so. Even dad seems to have become infected with the prevailing sentiment.—I am becoming quite concerned about him. I could almost think that he had gone over to the enemy—I am seriously contemplating such a move myself.

"I fear I am not very encouraging—I am in rather bad form to-day, I must admit. But what can be expected of a girl who has been calmly set aside and given

to understand that there is serious business afoot—or in hand—much too serious to be entrusted to her. I have fallen considerably below par in my own estimation, and—well, you may as well know—I am angry. Oh, yes! I can see you smile—a woman's anger is such a trifling thing.

"And now that I have said what I really intended to say, I shall leave you to reflect upon your conduct. I need not say that I wish you success most heartily, even if I do find it somewhat difficult to sign myself,

Your sincere friend,

EVIS GODDARD."

"P. S. I am not *real* angry, but I *should* like to know what is going on, and I *don't* like my information second hand from the very people I *do* so dislike."

CHAPTER XXIV

A "REAL AND TRULY" STORY

DAVE and Joe arrived from the West on schedule time, and immediately set about making the acquaintance of the great city, and gratifying curiosities and desires of long standing. For the most part they maintained a mien of quiet imperturbability, their rough bronzed countenances giving little indication of what was transpiring in their minds. Their visit to the Stock Exchange, one of the first places to which their curiosity led them, was productive of a fairly free expression of their impressions of that particular institution. They had heard many strange and wonderful tales of this great money mart where the finances of the nation were turned topsy-turvy, and where men jumped from poverty and obscurity to wealth and renown in an incredibly short space of time. Besides, they felt something of a personal interest in the place which they understood would sooner or later be the scene of a "round up," in which they would be vitally interested. By special request, therefore, Waldron took them up into the visitors' gallery from where they surveyed the throng of clamorous men and scurrying messenger boys for a full quarter of an hour without uttering a syllable.

"Our scrap goin' to be pulled off down there?" Joe

was finally moved to inquire, and receiving a nod in the affirmative, again turned his attention below.

"I've seen packs of gray-backs snappin' and snarlin' and yawlin' over a carcass afore now, but I never 'lowed to see human folks—them as is eddicated up to the top notch—goin' through the same maneuvers," Dave solemnly affirmed, as he gazed upon the strange scene. "I reckon there's a strain of the same blood that one or the other of us ain't outgrown—don't seem to be runnin' out much neither far as I can see."

"I 'low I'm kinder disappointed," Joe reluctantly admitted. "It ain't jest what I expected to see considerin' all the fuss made about it. If Tenderfoot or some no account chap like him was down there to start 'em all to goin' disagreeable like, might be some sense in it."

"If I was mad as some of them chaps 'pear to be I reckon there'd be somethin' doin' besides hollerin' the top of my head off about it," said Dave, with ill concealed disgust. "Let's mosey," he suggested, a few minutes later, his curiosity apparently satisfied. "No use gettin' riled up over any argyment we can't take a hand in. This 'ere's a gentleman's game, and that lets us out —an' I 'low my feelin's ain't much hurt," he added, as he shot a parting glance below.

"Guess they don't need our help nohow—nobody 'pears to be gettin' hurt. Looks like they're all tryin' to frighten each other to death—them as ain't settin' around tuckered out like," was Joe's final observation, as he turned away.

Miss Edith Winston had promptly expressed an enthusiastic desire to meet these men of the West, when she had learned of their proposed visit. Her desire, so

long possessed, to behold a real and truly Westerner, had not as yet been gratified. Mr. Waldron had utterly failed to satisfy the fastidious ideas of the young miss. She liked Mr. Waldron—very much indeed; but she was speaking of something quite different. Mr. Waldron might be a New Yorker, for all one could say to the contrary, and surely a real and truly Westerner must be a creature of entirely different parts. She wanted to see the sort of men she had read about—great big strapping men who carried those terrifying and death-dealing guns. Men who rode for days and weeks on lonely trails and discovered rich mines. Men who fought Indians and highwaymen—in short, the typical men of the plains and mountains.

Mr. Waldron seemed ever willing to gratify the slightest wish of this little maid, and she was one day informed that her oft-repeated desire to behold a wild and woolly Westerner should be appeased. Cathalee had also expressed a similar desire, all seemingly interested in these rough strangers, friends of their friend.

David Bishop and Joseph Sutter were truly typical Westerners; not, however, of the type commonly conceded to drink distilled lightning, shoot at sight, ride their horses into saloons, and clean out whole towns. They were men born and bred in the West who early in life had discovered the necessity for a law-abiding element even in that wild country, and ranging themselves on the side of law and order, had steadfastly maintained their ground, and fought for it when circumstances demanded, which not infrequently happened. They were reckoned as sharp and shrewd mining men. They had made and lost fortunes, which was no reflection on their

abilities, as such happenings were of every day occurence, and fell to the lot of the wisest and shrewdest. They had invariably landed on their feet, which was the real test, and were never long the victims of circumstance.

Joe Sutter knew little of the sex feminine, and was inclined to be rather ill at ease in the company of "high class gals," so Waldron and Jack very considerately came to his rescue, and took him for a tramp along the shore, which was more in his line, and vastly more to his liking.

David Bishop, on the contrary, took to woman's society like a courtier, much to the wonderment of his friend Joe, who "'lowed Dave allus was a shifty critter." As for the young miss, her wish was gratified at last. These men would do very well. They were quite all her fancy had pictured—they were the genuine article so far as her limited knowledge availed. Their forms of speech were certainly characteristic of the Western country, and conformed to her preconceived ideas as well as could be expected. To be sure, some very strange expressions worked their way into the conversation now and again, but they caused no embarrassment whatever; a halt was immediately called and the complexity removed to the satisfaction of the little miss before the conversation was suffered to go on, affording no little amusement for the rough fellows, and tending to make them feel more at ease than the more formal, but no less well intended efforts of the elders. Their exteriors were rough, but they were warm hearted and good natured, she was sure, and—well, they were friends

of Mr. Waldron, which was sufficient to ensure them a warm welcome.

A mutual interest seemed to spring up almost immediately between Dave Bishop and the little miss. "Never shied—kept me busy from start to finish. As purty a little filly as I ever cast an eye over," he afterwards declared to Waldron. Mrs. Winston, Cathalee, Maude and Edith had him in charge for the time, or more properly, as he himself declared, Edith monopolized his attention, while the others, close at hand, were very interested and attentive listeners.

"I wanted to meet you and Mr. Sutter—and so did we all—for several reasons," she explained, in a burst of confidence. "You see, we all like Mr. Waldron so very much, we wanted to know you, because you are his friends. And then I thought if you were real good-natured—and I know now you are—you would tell me some real and truly stories about the things you have done. It will be so much nicer than reading about them because I shall know they are quite true.

"Well, well, Missy!" laughed Dave, much amused at the enthusiasm of his little inquisitor, "and so you've been waitin' for Joe and Dave to tell you about things Mister Bill can tell you a heap sight better than us?"

"Whom do you mean by Mister Bill? Mister Waldron?"

"Sartin, sure! Who else could I mean, little one? 'Pears to me you ain't over well acquainted with Mister Bill after all," said Dave, laughing heartily at the pert inquiry of the little miss.

"How odd! And why do you call him Mister Bill instead of Mister Waldron? Or, if you prefer Bill,

why not call him—well, just plain Bill?" she was curious to know, much to his increased amusement.

"Well, little one, I'll tell you, seein' as how Mister Bill ain't done it himself. No harm for you to know, and maybe you'll thank me for tellin' you—all the more, perhaps, as you'd never be likely to know it any other way. It ain't no great secret nohow, and no ways a long story. You see when Mister Bill first showed up out there in our country, he was a tenderfoot. But he had plenty of sand and all 'round good sense, and he took to our rough ways like a bird to the wing, and 'twan't long afore he could ride a horse, shoot, trail, trap, rope a steer, and anythin' else a chap need to do, jest about as well as any of us, and a tarnal sight better'n most. Then he up and went us some better, and done things we couldn't do nohow, 'cause we didn't know enough. We don't all start from the same mark, little one, and some of us ain't so much to blame for things we don't know, but I ain't never discovered that eddication makes a man—anyhow, it ain't sure bettin'. But it's a purty handy thing to have, and many a chap puts up a mighty big bluff on the strength of it. You see, he was one of us, but he was different. We could see it plain enough, and thought a heap sight more of him for not lettin' on as how he could see it. He could turn his hand to most anythin'. If a chap broke his leg or anythin' short of his head, Mister Bill could fix him up. Anybody sick, Mister Bill was the doctor. Any dockyments to be made out, Mister Bill was the lawyer. Argyments and disputes were turned over to Mister Bill to settle—he was on the level, and we knew it dead sartin. You see, Missy, he never loses his head; screwed un-

commonly tight on them wide shoulders of his, and I ain't never seen the man—nor woman, far as that goes—as could turn it. He ain't never abused himself with licker and terbacker, and he's made a good many of the boys quit makin' fools of theirselves—not preachin'—Mister Bill ain't no preacher except he took the notion, then I 'low he could preach as well as the next chap—but they jest naterally shamed theirselves when he showed 'em as how a feller could be a man without makin' a fool of himself. But bless you, little one, everybody knows Mister Bill, and them as don't is misfortunate. There's mighty few nights go by there ain't prayers said for that boy, and he deserves 'em all. More than one poor devil, and woman and child, owes him their lives, and he carries marks he didn't bring into the world with him to show for it. So you see, Miss, it comes mighty easy for them as knows him to call him Mister Bill—easier than anythin' else. It's about the only way they have of lettin' him know as how they respect him different from any other Bill, or Joe or Dave. It's no slouch to have 'em call you Mister out in that country—they're great sticklers for short handles. And that, little Miss, is why we call him Mister Bill."

"Oh, isn't that perfectly lovely!" impulsively cried the little miss, with difficulty restraining the tears that persisted in welling into her bright eyes. "And was he ever —was he really and truly hit—shot, I mean? And are those the marks you mean, Mr. Bishop?" queried the little mite of curious femininity, with fearsome concern.

"Well, now, little one," laughed Dave, patting her reassuringly on the shoulder, "don't you go to worryin' about Mister Bill. He can take care of himself, and no

trouble howsomever. He's never been put on his back yet as I knows of, and the man may live as can do it—I ain't sayin' he don't—but he ain't never showed up. Jest let that boy think he's right, and bless you, Miss, you can't stop him nohow. He's a fighter that don't know how to quit 'till he gets that he's fightin' for."

"Oh, isn't that grand! And just to think, Cathy and Maude, we have known him all this time, and never knew how very brave and good he is. You see, Mr. Bishop, he has never told us very much about himself. We thought we knew him, but we didn't. When I ask him to tell me about himself and the things he has done, he tells me something funny. He seems to think I am only a little girl—or a joke—and he is never quite serious when he talks with me. He told me about an unruly horse throwing him into a creek when he was a tenderfoot, and how a very bad man was going to make him dance the way those horrid men do by shooting at his feet."

"Did he say what happened to the bad man, little one?"

"He said they—they compromised, I think."

"Well, well, that's purty good!" chuckled Dave. "If it was a compromise I guess as how the bad man was mighty glad it wan't no fight. But that's about as much satisfaction as you're liable to get to let Mister Bill spin the yarn."

"Please tell me something that Mister Bill has done —really and truly. I think I rather like that funny name after all—don't you, girls?"

"Indeed, I do—I think it just splendid!" declared Maude, enthusiastically. "Somehow I am not the least bit surprised; it seems as if I had known it all the while."

Cathalee, however, ventured no comment, nor raised her eyes from her work.

"Do you think, Mr. Bishop, that he would mind if I called him Mister Bill?" inquired Edith, very seriously.

"Well, little one, that's purty hard to say," replied Dave, equally serious, "but I have an idee that your little heart wouldn't ache long for anythin' you could ask of Mister Bill, and I guess you're safe in callin' him jest about anythin' you take a notion. Leastwise, if you have any doubts, jest try it on, and if he kicks up disagreeable like, tell him that old Dave Bishop egged you on, and between us both I guess we can bring him 'round all right," which suggestion seemed to amuse the speaker no less than his listeners.

"I protest that I am an unwilling accomplice to a base conspiracy—I feel guilty already," laughed Maude.

"It will be jolly to surprise him by calling him Mister Bill, won't it, girls? But then, of course, he will be sure to know who told us, won't he, Mr. Bishop?"

"Mighty likely to guess first time, I should say, little one. A real and truly story? Well, Miss, I couldn't tell you no other. I've never read books no account, and the only kind I know is what you call real and truly—and them in plenty. The story I'm goin' to yarn ain't very long, and wouldn't amount to much writ out in a book, like enough, but it may mean more to you—same as it does to me—than all the stories in them fine books up there—good and all right enough, no sort of doubt. A chap can say a heap of things that wouldn't amount to much if some feller didn't prove that jest as smart and jest as brave men live and breathe as is writ about.

There's a sight of difference between a bird shut up in a cage, and the same bird flyin' around nateral like.

"One winter, about five year ago," he began, with great deliberation, "a poor devil, lookin' as how he was purty nigh done for, dragged what was left of his miserable old body into a minin' camp out in the Colorader mountins. The boys hauled him into one of the shanties and poured enough licker down his throat to most put out the mighty small spark of life left in him. He'd been staggerin' along through the snow draggin' one foot after the other without knowin' it, jest 'cause he'd set his mind on keepin' goin' so long as he could stand up. He didn't seem to know he'd reached camp and kept on fightin' the trail—he was plumb loco. The boys worked over him for a spell, and finally managed to bring his senses back, but he was purty well used up, and mighty small stakes for a man. He told the boys as how his pard had took sick up in their camp, and they had run out of grub, and with starvation starin' 'em both in the face, he had started out to make the big camp, kind of hopin' agin hope that he might hold on long enough to reach it, but mighty unsartin. Said his pardner would sure die if he didn't get grub and medicine mighty soon; as how he would start back himself if he could stand on his old frozen feet—his will was all right, but his old body was way shy of the mark. Snowed off and on for a week, and no sign of lettin' up—one of them black snorters you never seed the like of, little one. The trail was all gone and snow six or seven feet on the level, and no tellin' how deep up in the mountins and in the gulches, and maybe the whole mountain side might take to slidin' and cover a man up in a jiffy. Not a minute

but somethin' or other was liable to knock him over, even if he didn't lose his bearin's, no ways unlikely, and besides, 'twas crazy cold—and that means purty cold. The poor devil was sure in hard luck. His pardner starvin' up there in the mountins for a few bites of grub, and him havin' to ask a man jest about the same as go out and jump in the river—which ain't no easy thing to do. You see, Missy, he knew there was jest about one chance in a hundred that a man could pull through.

"Mister Bill was on hand, and thawed out the frost bites of the used up counterfeit, fixed him up some porridge and fed it to him fast as he could stow it away, and jest naterally nursed him back to life. He asked the poor chap all about his pardner and the whereabouts of their camp, talkin' to him jest conversational like, and made him forget how no account he was. When he was feelin' sort of comfortable, Mister Bill straightened up—I tell you, little one, he looked mighty big and strong—and said good natered and careless like—jest like he allus talks, 'All right, old man, don't worry. We'll open up communication with your pard—not exactly telegraphic, but more satisfactory to a hungry man,' and down he goes to his cabin, and was back agin in a few minutes ready for a trip that meant about ninety-nine chances agin him to one—not exactly in his favor. The boys tried mighty hard to keep him from goin'. All hands agreed 'twas next to sure death. Some said the chap might be dead, and no use makin' a bad matter worse. Some more thought maybe it might clear up to-morrer, and he'd better hold on a while longer. They purty much all had somethin' to say, but Mister Bill only laughed, and said as how they were all mad 'cause he had got

the first start—that any of 'em would go in a minute if he didn't. Besides, he knew the trail—or where it ought to be—better than them, and maybe a man's stomach wouldn't wait for the weather to shift, and a few crumbs might encourage it to hang on a leetle longer, and off he went.

"The poor cuss left behind wished he was twins, so as he could go himself. He seemed to think it was a heap sight easier to die twice himself, than to send another feller to die for him. He was purty nigh crazy he was so helpless. You see, Missy, if he kept Mister Bill from goin'—which he could no ways do—his pardner would sure die, and he might die anyway, and Mister Bill besides. And little one," gently patting the sunny little head, tears welling into his honest eyes, and his voice trembling with emotion, "Dave Bishop hopes he'll never have another such load on his miserable old conscience in all his born days, for it was me, little girl, stretched out in that shanty, and old Joe Sutter up there in the mountins, and me sendin' Mister Bill off to almost sartin death, and not able to raise my hand to stop him. There's some things, little one, we don't like to be responsible for, and it's mighty lucky they're taken out of our hands when they get too heavy for us to handle.

"Mister Bill never had much to say about that trip. It was no ways a pleasure jaunt, but he made the cabin somehow with the medicine and rations that saved old Joe's life. Joe says Mister Bill jest fell into the cabin all in a heap, he was that far gone. And old Dave Bishop thanks God for givin' the boy strength to get up to that cabin—that same Dave Bishop would no ways care about livin' if Mister Bill had never come back from that trip.

I don't know nothin' about how a father holds his boy, but I nary believe a dad ever thought more of his own flesh and blood than Joe and me thinks of Mister Bill. And that's one reason, little Miss, why two rough old duffers love Mister Bill, and ain't ashamed to say so."

Womanly hearts were too little proof against the homely pathos of the simple tale, and heads bowed lower and lower over the work in hand, while bright eyes filled with tears, and one of the little circle—Cathalee, by name—took abrupt leave and hurried away upstairs.

"You see, Miss, it ain't so much of a story. No high soundin' words like you read maybe every day, but jest a little pictur of our rough life out there among the mountins, but its real and truly—that's what you wanted. And if you think a rough old fellow's advice is worth rememberin', little woman, jest rest easy with the real and truly, and you'll never be bothered by the things as ain't, and there's a mighty sight of 'em in this world."

CHAPTER XXV

THE HOLD-UP PARTY

THE Davidge mansion was a scene of light, music, and mirth this night. The annual charity affair was in full swing. "The name, indeed! I was not even permitted the privilege of naming my own party," Cathalee declared. "By a unanimity simply marvelous my friends persisted in presiding at the christening, and carried the day by sheer force of numbers. It is none other than 'The Hold-Up Party.' Such a terrible name! Yet it commends itself to the extent of calling a spade a spade, and on the whole relieves me of a certain responsibility," she explained, with amiable resignation.

In a corner of one of the spacious parlors was a small stage from which certain features of entertainment were dispensed. The efforts of the performers were admirable exhibitions of nerve and physical force, and occasionally succeeded in rising above the reigning confusion to the extent of making it apparent that something or other was transpiring in the direction of the stage. The stage entertainment—so called by courtesy—and the dancing were the only untaxable features of entertainment. Tribute was levied upon the just and the unjust alike, and the unfortunate who labored under the delusion that trade formalities were recognized was destined to suffer an early and a rude awakening.

Maude and Edith had come to town for the affair. The former was one of Cathalee's prime assistants, while Edith was in charge of Mrs. Worthington, very little in evidence, and altogether considerably subdued by the very austere mien of her chaperone, and the general worldly aspect of the gathering.

Jack was an early arrival according to instructions, and meeting Maude and Edith in the hall greeted his sister with true brotherly affection, and seemed not inclined to overlook the prerogatives of a sweetheart, but Maude was a charity girl this night. "Free-list entirely suspended, sir! Kisses don't buy shoes for barefoot orphans," Maude coldly declared, proceeding to attach a boutonniere to his coat. "Mrs. Davidge says that I am to have nothing whatever to do with sentiment this evening, but must attend strictly to business—one dollar, please."

"Even my own family has turned against me," he sighed. "What is your specialty, Sis?" he demanded, regarding with some suspicion the demure young miss intently watching this questionable proceeding. "Thank you, my dear," he said, with unmistakable cynicism, handing Maude a two dollar bill, which she dropped carelessly into her basket, with a matter of fact, "Don't mention it, my dear."

"Don't I get a dollar back?" meekly inquired the victim of misplaced confidence. "My youth and inexperience are being imposed upon," he declared, upon being informed that there was no precedent for such a proceeding.

"What is the matter, Jack?" inquired Cathalee, who appeared at that moment. "Indeed, young man, you are

in huge luck! Think had it been a tenner!" she told him, consolingly, when he had explained the "hold-up," as he termed his initiation.

"Then I'm eight dollars ahead. Much obliged, Cathy, but I don't like your system—the percentage is against the outsider."

Jack's experience was but one of many continually transpiring throughout the evening as new arrivals put in an appearance, affording no little amusement for those who had preceded and undergone a similar initiation. Cathalee was everywhere present simply overflowing with laughing good nature, keeping everybody keyed up to the proper pitch, and the whole affair moving along with the dash and spirit characteristic of herself, and withal performing the duties of hostess and holder-up-in-chief as well as the two could be expected to coalesce.

"Yes, I am quite beyond words!" she frankly admitted. "I welcome my guests with one hand, and the other goes immediately to their pockets. Why, yes, to be sure, I am an expert! You, sir, would rather be waylaid by me than to have wealth thrust upon you by another? Very well, sir, your fine preference shall be duly rewarded." And to an elderly admirer, who professed profound pleasure at the purchase of a beautiful rose from one of her fair assistants—like from like—as he poetically delivered himself, "How beautiful!" she told him, "Take two and be doubly pleased—indeed, take three and be thrice blessed," ever returning a laughing reply or bright repartee to the badinage flung at her as she wended her way among her guests.

"Oh, Major! you shall settle a vexed question I have with Mr. Chadeller," she exclaimed, suddenly coming

upon these two gentlemen. "Mr. Chadeller promised to subscribe one hundred dollars to my fund under certain conditions, and now he stands upon a mere technicality, which I don't think is fair."

"Excuse me, my dear!" vigorously protested the old fellow, "I'll have nothing to do with any dispute. Egad! before I know it you would have me in the same box. Take my advice, Chadeller, if she has any claim on you, pay up. Might as well settle first as last, and save yourself trouble—mark me!"

"Oh, indeed! you dare me, Mr. Chadeller! Will you at least kindly bear witness, Major—the gentleman dares the lady. I warn you, sir, I am entirely unscrupulous—the end will justify the means, whatever they may be. No, I promise not to sign your name to any checks. I do respect my liberty if not my conscience. Very well, sir, you leave me no alternative but to do my worst—you may have cause to regret your rashness."

"Bad business, Chadeller—bad business!" declared the Major, shaking his head disapprovingly. It's only inviting trouble to dare a woman—just encouraging the natural instincts of the sex to get after us poor devils."

"Too serious a view, Major—too serious by half," replied Mr. Chadeller, with characteristic assurance. We have to handicap ourselves a little now and then to make it half way interesting—a little extra weight for age and worldly experience, you know, Major."

"Egad, Colonel! What do you think?" blustered the Major to his old crony whom he chanced to run across some time later. "A crowd of those young chaps have just been telling me about a new drink they have trumped up over at the club. New drink!" he indignantly ex-

claimed, making a wry face. "Here I am, Colonel, sixty-seven years old, and I'm free to say that I haven't even discovered the possibilities of the old drinks—let alone exhausting them. And hang me, sir, what's more, I don't expect to even if I live to be a hundred—and have a relapse. Colonel, some folks are never satisfied to let well enough alone."

"There's where our reputations are torn into shreds and scattered to the four winds—over in that corner," he declared, when he had recovered his equilibrium, suddenly catching sight of a certain select coterie of the opposite sex engaged in very animated conversation. "They draw and quarter a poor devil behind his back, smirk and palaver to his face, break his bread and drink his wine. Egad! if they didn't have straight gullets they would surely choke to death."

"That they would," gruffly replied the Colonel, "but they're a sort of necessary evil, Major. We do a deal of swearing, but finally swallow 'em like poor liquor that we know won't lay well on our stomachs, and more than likely to turn us over in the night. But we must have the stimulant. Might as well try to run New York without a tiger as society without its scandal-mongers. Such old chaps as you and I, Major, would have to take to the woods, or go out and fight the niggers to find a little excitement."

"He may be all that a man should be—as men go—but there is something very mysterious about the whole affair. Who is he—does anybody know?" demanded one of this precious group, almost defiantly.

"I hope she knows more than she seems inclined to tell. I always said that she would distinguish herself,

and she seems in a fair way to do it," snapped another.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken the Major himself has not unraveled the mystery. He was positively disagreeable this evening when I mentioned the subject—a sure sign that he is in the dark, or does not approve," declared another, with great gusto.

"It is time he was putting in an appearance. Of course she will not miss such an opportunity of parading him before us all," cynically observed another.

"Oh, to be sure! She has already promised several of her intimates that the mysterious gentleman shall be presented to them. For my part I have no desire to become entangled with any mystery—"

"I should positively refuse!"

"Pray, excuse me!"

"The idea!"

"Mercy!"

Exclaimed these very estimable ladies in chorus, with much shrugging of shoulders and bosoms heaving with virtuous indignation. Two or three of their number were claimed by their partners in the dance, thus putting an end to a very interesting discussion.

Miss Constance Hillman had been a very surprised young woman when, a day or two after her departure from the city, she had received a very curt note from her father—rather more peremptory than the circumstances required, she could but feel—informing her that there was to be no further reference to the presence in the city of a certain individual. Mr. Herringdon had also received similar positive instructions when, with no little importance, he had informed Mr. Hillman of the situation in detail. That young man was not a little sur-

prised and considerably at a loss to account for this unceremonious disposition of possibly interesting complications, and was finally compelled to attribute the strange action to one of those unaccountable eccentricities for which the great man was noted. Behind this particular eccentricity, however, as well as many others, was a well defined motive. Mr. Hillman had no intention of giving any unnecessary publicity to the recent happenings in the Western mining district. The whole affair had been humiliating to him as a man, and would not tend to enhance his reputation with his business associates or with the public. Moreover, reluctant as he was to admit it, even to himself, he had a wholesome respect for this same man with whom he had no desire to again measure strength until he was more sure of his ground. In the meantime there was nothing to be gained by incurring the displeasure of the other side. To this eccentricity, therefore, may be attributed in no small degree the mystery surrounding the stranger—a mystery as desirable to one as the other, at least for the present.

"I tell you, Burrows, there's something wrong. There's a nigger in the fence, or my name is not Morrison."

"My opinion, and has been for a week or more," declared Mr. Lowe, another member of a group of men engaged in earnest discussion. Mr. Lowe was a banker and broker having Cathalee's financial affairs in charge. Mr. Morrison was also a broker, and both men, as well as others of the group, were closely allied with Mr. Burrows in various large financial transactions.

"What do you say, Francis?" sarcastically inquired Mr. Burrows of another member of the group. "Do you believe that we are about to be swallowed up by a nigger

in the fence? Nonsense!" he growled, with infinite disgust. "What can be wrong? The whole thing is in our hands as it always has been, and as it will remain so long as we have any use for it. But it's on its last legs —good for about one more squeeze. She's served us pretty well, and we can't complain if she is finally milked dry."

"May be all right, but looks very suspicious to me just the same," Mr. Morrison insisted. "The stock has been climbing slowly and steadily for several weeks past; in the last few days it seems to have taken a new lease of life despite the fact that we have been selling pretty freely. Somebody is picking it up as fast as we drop it. May be the public taking a new interest,—or may not be. Whatever the cause, we must put a stop to it at once —it has gone far enough. We are not prepared for a bull movement in the stock at this time."

"I don't feel just right about it myself," said Mr. Lowe. "Acts very strangely to me. I have been watching it pretty closely of late as I have made Mrs. Davidge interested, feeling assured that it was perfectly safe. I have been holding this money of hers for some time awaiting certain investments, and thought it might make a turn for itself while lying idle. Besides, I am pretty heavily interested myself, and I cannot afford to see the thing go wrong at this particular time."

"Utter and complete rot!" declared Mr. Burrows, with irritable impatience. "You are all frightened before you are hurt. I tell you the thing is all right. To be sure the stock has been going up—all the better—it will drop all the harder. Some idiots have taken to buying simply because it has shown a little life, and they imagine there

is something behind it; but they'll run like a flock of scared sheep when we get after them."

"Oh, I have no doubt whatever as to ultimate outcome —not the least in the world," Mr. Lowe hastened to assure his leader.

"I am advised that the mills were shut down tight as a drum today," continued Mr. Burrows. "So much for the new board of directors. Fact is, they are landed high and dry—worked out flat. I have been waiting for them to get to the end of their rope. You see I am in pretty close touch with them—not a move can they make but is immediately reported to me. Looks like a flourishing condition at the mines—very inviting indeed, for a bull movement in the stock," he sarcastically observed.

"Now is the time to strike—she'll simply fall of her own weight," declared Mr. Morrison.

"We'll get after the whole crowd bright and early tomorrow morning and break their backs before they have a chance to unload. We'll drive them into the woods so far they'll never get back. We'll secure possession of the Properties practically on our own terms, and then I'll show you a trick that has not yet been turned."

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! I protest!" exclaimed Cathalee, sweeping into the room just in time to catch these dire threats. "What a terribly cruel man you are, to be sure, Mr. Burrows. And upon whom, pray, is such punishment to be inflicted?"

"Bulls!" laughed Mr. Morrison. "The bulls are to be summarily dealt with tomorrow. We must apologize, Mrs. Davidge, for talking shop, but the fact is, we are all interested in a certain important movement to be in-

augurated tomorrow, in which, by the way, you are also interested—Consolidated Properties—as perhaps you are aware?"

"I was not, but you are quite excusable. The whole party seems to have gone stark mad over the general subject. As it seems quite the proper thing, I suppose I should be glad that I am—what shall I say—in on it? Is that slang, or a technical expression? I said it, and then wondered where I got it."

A general movement was being made towards the parlors. A very mysterious and impromptu feature of the entertainment had just been announced. Cathalee ascended the little stage, and stood for a moment awaiting quiet before speaking. "What piece of deviltry is that girl up to now?" queried the Major of his friend the Colonel. "Something is going to happen, I'd stake my old head. I see it in her eyes—she's just boiling over with mischief."

"Friends," she said, pausing for a moment and glancing over her audience as if to sense its humor, "I am about to announce a very unusual feature of entertainment. It is not necessary that I should mention the very worthy object for which you are all lending me your hearty and generous and very substantial assistance this evening, nor need I speak of the sacrifices more or less exacting many of us are called upon to make in order to successfully prosecute the work we have undertaken. Suffice to say, we reckon not the mental or physical discomforts if our poor efforts but accomplish the desired purpose. This, then, is the justification that I feel and offer—if, indeed, justification really be needed in behalf of so worthy a cause. Frankly, ladies and gentlemen, I am

about to offer to the highest bidder a—kiss. The single stipulation, that the fortunate gentleman—pardon my presumption—shall receive his purchase immediately, and on this stage, unless he chooses to waive claim—also for the good of the cause—which, however, is entirely optional."

The speech was delivered in a manner entirely characteristic of the speaker, and was received with varying expressions of approval and disapproval by her guests. The gentlemen enthusiastically applauded; a portion of the feminine element was manifestly amused; another was unmistakably shocked. Charity was no excuse; there was a limit even in behalf of charity, and this—this exceeded the limit. Certain husbands and sweethearts were promptly instructed to refrain from taking any part in the questionable proceedings. Varied thoughts and subdued expressions; outward smiles and excited speculations. Mr. Lowe was requested to record the bids in due form, and all was soon in readiness.

"I am sure, gentlemen," she said, "that you will appreciate a certain embarrassment I am bound to feel, and not compel me to repeat any portion of my previous remarks. I shall simply ask—how much am I offered?"

"Five dollars!" simultaneously declared an effeminate voice, which was discovered to emanate from Bertie Holly.

"Five dollars!" repeated the fair auctioneer, with incredulous emphasis, looking down upon the reckless bidder. "I fear I have over-estimated the market value of my wares."

"Ten dollars!" indignantly cried Jack Winston, gallantly coming to the rescue.

"Thank you, Jack, that is very much better!" she told him, very gratefully. But that young man had evidently gone abroad for trouble.

"See here, Jack Winston, there are others who can furnish a very satisfactory article—at cut rates, if you please—and don't you dare bid again!" were the very positive instructions he received from a certain young woman standing at his side.

"Oh, me! I'm suffering with pleasure," he sighed. "When I don't want to buy, I'm held up. When I want to give up, I'm held down. I don't like your party, Cathy!" he told her, convulsing the auctioneer, as well as those immediately in front, and temporarily interrupting proceedings.

Fifteen dollars was bid, Mr. Chadeller offered twenty, and the movement was quickly established. Several of the older men soon withdrew, leaving the contention to the younger men, some of whom seemed not inclined to stand calmly by and see a coveted boon carried off without a struggle. "Eighty—eighty-five—ninety—ninety-five!" called the gay auctioneer, the bids following one after the other in quick succession amid increasing excitement. "One hundred!" she suddenly cried, with exultant emphasis, and SOLD! to Mr. George F. Chadeller—one kiss—one hundred dollars! You have it, Mr. Lowe—very well." A tumult of good natured protest followed this sudden termination of the bidding which, however, quickly turned to laughter and applause, and hearty congratulations for the fortunate purchaser.

The Major was in paroxysms of levity, and his round red face gradually assumed a deeper hue until it became positively purple. "She's fixed you, Chadeller—she's

fixed you after all!" he managed to vociferate, between spasms. "I'd have sworn it—I tell you, you can't beat that girl."

"I'm perfectly satisfied with my bargain," replied that gentleman, very complacently, which seemed a turn of the affair on which the Major had not reckoned.

"May be—may be! But I wouldn't give you ten cents for your bargain and take your chances—and I'm not so devilishly decrepit at that," he doggedly declared.

"Mr. Chadeller, do you insist upon the delivery of your purchase according to stipulation, or will you waive claim in the name of charity?" the auctioneer would know, when quiet had been restored.

"Very well," she laughed, the gentleman seeming not inclined to surrender any of his rights in the premises, "the transaction is strictly on a cash basis. Kindly settle with Mr. Lowe, and your purchase shall be duly delivered."

"Settled!" announced Mr. Lowe, with imperturbable business formality.

Mr. Chadeller seemed not entirely at his ease as he made his way to the stage, but having gone so far no retreat seemed open to him, even if he had so desired, which, in truth, was not apparent. The very atmosphere seemed charged with feverish expectancy, and grew more tense each instant. Strangely enough she whom it might naturally be supposed would be the one most concerned was to all appearances the calmest person in the room, and awaited the coming of the gentleman with entire composure. But who may be sure of the ways of a woman when she has a will to accomplish her way? Surely not Mr. Chadeller, or he might have been even

more ill at ease, and a little less confident of the power of his gold to win him that which he had failed to win for himself. Even he would have done well to remember that there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.

"I really think it very uncharitable of you, Mr. Chadeller," she said, rather reproachfully, it seemed, as the gentleman advanced to the center of the stage, "but if you positively insist, I cannot, of course, interpose further objections," and parting the heavy draperies which served as the stage curtains, disclosed to the astonished gentleman the shining and expansive countenance of old Lindy, who appeared to be in tolerable enjoyment of a situation in which she was specially featured.

"You know the particular subject was not specified, Mr. Chadeller," she told him, very ingenuously, but the poor man had seen enough. His vanity had received a rude shock, and he beat a hasty retreat to the uproarious amusement of the company, while the Major suddenly discovered that his hilarity was flourishing at the expense of his breath, and if he would preserve the one, he must modify the other to an appreciable degree.

CHAPTER XXVI

WOMAN'S DIPLOMACY

SOME time later, Edith, peering about in search of Cathalee, finally discovered the object of her quest in earnest conversation with Mr. Chadeller. That gentleman had promptly disengaged himself from the group of financiers with whom he was conversing rather disinterestedly as Cathalee was passing, and expressed himself as very much aggrieved at the "beastly joke" perpetrated at his expense. "But you dared me, you know, Mr. Chadeller! It was all quite fair, you must admit, even if a trifle embarrassing, and —expensive," she laughed, apparently not in the least awed by the serious aspect of her offense in his estimation.

"Oh, Cathy!" exclaimed Edith, suddenly coming upon them, "Mr. Waldron is here, and I have been looking all over for you. I'll fetch him!"

"Waldron!" exclaimed Mr. Chadeller, incredulously. "That man here—here in your house?"

This was certainly Mr. Chadeller's unlucky evening, yet he had only himself to blame for his earlier discomfiture, and again was he tempting fate with his reckless tongue. His irate state of mind—the most charitable excuse to be offered in his behalf—may have been in some degree responsible for the liberty he had thus, perhaps unconsciously, assumed.

"Is it possible that you would ask that—that hanger-on—into your house? He is nothing less—he is simply imposing upon your good nature—"

"Are you aware, Mr. Chadeller, that you are speaking of my guest?" Cathalee suddenly interposed, with chilling and imperious dignity.

Slightly preceded by Edith, the guest had entered the room apparently unconscious of the fact that he was the subject of the ill-timed remarks, and advanced to meet his hostess with entire composure, bestowing not even a glance upon Mr. Chadeller, against whom he almost brushed as that gentleman abruptly turned and quitted the room.

The group of gentlemen standing close by were compulsory observers of the incident, and after greeting her guest, whether from embarrassment, or a momentary confusion, or loyalty to her guest, she turned and introduced him to Mr. Burrows, Mr. Morrison and Mr. Lowe, which a second thought would have suggested was as unnecessary as undesirable, and more than likely to result in further embarrassment. The introduction was acknowledged by the merest nods, after which the gentlemen wandered away as by common consent.

"I fear I am a disturbing element in your social circle," the guest remarked, with much the same indifference that he might have commented upon the weather.

"And I feel that I should apologize for my social circle!" she indignantly replied. "I think it perfectly shameful—"

"No apology is necessary," he interposed. "You are not responsible for the civility of your guests—or the lack of it. I think them rather amusing than otherwise.

I could not possibly take them seriously, or at anything like their own valuation," he told her, with characteristic good nature, and the cool composure with which he had regarded the lately departed individuals, seemed to leave no doubt that his expressions were but the true index of his feelings.

"As usual, you rise superior to your surroundings," she laughed, not a little relieved that an embarrassing situation had been so easily dispelled. "I believe I was inclined to feel a certain sympathy for you—the men certainly behaved very shabbily; but on second thought I am rather sorry for them."

"One is hardly deserving of sympathy when one ventures into unwelcome circles," he replied, rather disinterestedly.

"Which does not in the least apply to you, sir!" she loyally protested. "You came because I particularly requested—even insisted. You have come late, and will remain but a few moments, simply because you could not well do less. Ah, yes, I understand perfectly! And to show you how much I appreciate your coming, I shall leave my guests to care for themselves, and talk to you until you give signs of being bored, when I shall introduce you to some of my friends who are especially anxious to make your acquaintance. Your eyes express doubt, sir; but I know whereof I speak. The luncheon, and our several appearances in the park have not been permitted to pass unnoticed, and an exceedingly well developed curiosity exists concerning my unknown—Ah, yes, they say it!—my handsome stranger. There are no two opinions on that point sir. But I am not going to tell him all the very interesting things said of him, which

I frankly admit please me very much—because I quite agree with them. Now am I not embarrassingly frank?" she paused to inquire, and to note the effect upon her guest of these very interesting disclosures.

"Indeed, not anything of the kind!" she vigorously protested. "I'll wager you ran a gauntlet of very pretty and very curious eyes as you came through the rooms. Do you fancy for one moment that I am the object of interest to those couples promenading past at this particular moment? Do you imagine that the men do not understand why they are being trotted back and forth? Or why the vague and uncertain replies to their pretty and gallant speeches? You, sir, are the cause of it all. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Oh, yes, you are! And I am not quite sure that I approve of all this unsolicited attention, and I think after all that I shall not introduce you to any one, but shall send you straight home when I have finished with you," and then she proceeded to do that which she had just disclaimed her intention of doing.

The gentleman may or may not have been conscious of the attention that he might in no small measure have apportioned to himself, but he could hardly have failed to note the decided change in the demeanor of his hostess since first they met. The briskness, and even aggressiveness of speech formerly so characteristic, had given way to softly modulated tones expressive of a certain feminine sweetness entirely foreign to her demeanor towards all others. Then, too, those dancing eyes seemed possessed of a secret of their own, and where once they darted sharp and saucily indifferent glances, they now

bespoke a warmer interest, and dwelt with a certain lingering tenderness—

"All my people are talking shop this evening," she told him, as they wended their way through the rooms. "Aside from bridge and stocks there is little doing nowadays, one worldly creature informed me. Unless one takes up with one or the other, one is quite outside the pale. I have refrained from indulging in either up to the present time, but it seems that I have now elected to identify myself with the stock movement."

"As the lesser of two evils?"

"Not necessarily. I really was not aware of my intention until a few moments ago, when I was informed that I was already an extensive participant—one of the advantages of not being compelled to think for oneself. Are you familiar with such things?" she suddenly inquired, regarding him attentively.

"Somewhat—some things," he replied, rather vaguely.

"Because there is one in particular," she explained, very confidentially," in which a lot of us are interested —something or other out West—Consolidated Places, or something of the sort—whose backs are to be broken."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes! It is all quite arranged. The whole crowd are to be driven into the woods to-morrow, and terrible things generally are to happen, and when it is all over, we have made a lot of money. At least Mr. Burrows has pronounced the edict, and the others seem to think the deed is as good as accomplished."

"And have you no sympathy for the unfortunates?"

"It is perfectly ridiculous for me to exhibit my dense

ignorance for your amusement," she laughed, suddenly conscious of an amused interest on the part of her guest. "I am simply an animated phonograph. I catch little squibs here and there as I go about, and then just say them without any well-defined idea of where they begin or end. I must stop it. One is simply flying in the face of fate to just repeat things without any definite idea of their meaning."

"True. People are very liable to make trouble for themselves, and sometimes—sometimes," he repeated, glancing curiously at his companion, "they unconsciously disclose very great secrets."

"Oh, I cannot possibly fancy myself doing anything quite so utterly stupid as that," she protested.

"And yet fancy sometimes plays strange pranks."

"You are pleased to be sarcastic, sir. But I refuse to be drawn into any argument. I am on safe ground for the present, and there I intend to remain," she declared, with great assurance.

"I was not conscious of preparing a pitfall for your unwary feet."

"I am willing to concede that you were not. Nevertheless, I have become very suspicious of those apparently harmless little remarks you deal out so quietly—they are sometimes double-edged, I have found to my sorrow. Upon several occasions I have played the role of the small boy who didn't know it was loaded. I am now wiser—even if a trifle disfigured," she laughingly declared.

"But we have strayed from our subject," she suddenly recalled. "Do you know what I have been talking

about? You are excusable if you do not, but I refer particularly to all this talk in the air."

"Are you a bull or a bear, on these Consolidated—Places, I believe you called them?" he asked, quietly amused at the particular turn the conversation had taken.

"Bull? Bear?"

"To be sure. Are you long or short?"

"Must one be something—one or the other?"

"Yes. One should choose with fine discretion with such terrible happenings in store for—one or the other."

"Well, really, I don't know what I am, except that I am a simpleton in matters of business," she frankly admitted, "but I hope I am not a bull; I should find it particularly inconvenient to be driven into the woods to-morrow. Mr. Lowe has all my business affairs in charge, you know—of course you don't know, but I am going to tell you. Mr. Davidge had the utmost confidence in Mr. Lowe, and none at all in me—in matters of business—so I was very considerately relieved of all responsibility, and Mr. Lowe was given sole charge of my affairs of business. I am perfectly helpless in anything and everything pertaining to finances. I know perfectly well when I require money—I am not at all stupid in that respect—and I have only to tell Mr. Lowe what I require, and it is all perfectly simple and lovely. Some day I intend to become more familiar with my extensive affairs as I have great ideas I hope to put into execution before I pass into the sere and yellow state. But you have not told me whether you think I should be a bull or a bear. I am sure you know quite well, if you were sufficiently interested to tell me," which flattering expression of confidence would in-

dicate that milady was well versed in certain other things, not the least of which was man. "I am going to ask Mr. Lowe just what I am," she said, and another subject quickly engaged her attention.

And so it happens that woman is not at all times a skillful and consistent diplomat. How often does she flatter this susceptible creature man—as perhaps in the present instance—by asking his lordly opinion of matters and things she professes a wish to know. What does he think—what can he think—when, if you please, before he is given a chance to speak, the subject is abruptly changed? Does he think she really wished to know that of which she asked? And if so, why, by the great and abiding love in which he holds her, is he not allowed to speak? Or, if she really did not care to know, why did she ask? Why, indeed?

CHAPTER XXVII

"THE TONGUE IS BUT A FOOLISH JESTER"

THE guests had long since departed, and the house was dark and still save one small room where only the fire light broke the shadows, and the stillness of the wee small hours was disturbed only by the softly modulated voices of two daintily robed creatures for whom rest and sleep possessed no allurements. Only less important than the affair itself are these aftermaths—pleasure or pain—all must be carefully gone over and weighed in the balance before sleep can be wooed.

"And do you know, Cathy, whom I think was the most interesting of the men?" asked one prettily robed person of the other, at whose feet she was comfortably nestled.

"Jack!" replied the other, diverting her gaze from the flames, and smiling indulgently on the spaeker. "Who else, to be sure?"

"Nonsense, Cathy! Jack is my Jack, of course; but he is only a boy. Wasn't he superb in evening dress? And how well he carried himself! And how big and strong he looked beside the other men! And what a really handsome man he is!"

"Who, dear?"

"Why, Mister Bill, to be sure! He was far and away

the most interesting of all the men. Now don't tell me you don't think so, Cathy, because I shall be very, very, angry—indeed I shall," she declared, with pretty insistence. "And how all the people noticed him as he passed through the rooms with Edith—indeed how could they do otherwise, when such an interesting stranger suddenly appeared in their midst," she prattled on, no reply being offered. "Have you noticed how he shows Edith the same attention, the same quiet deference that he pays to an older person. The little minx enjoys it hugely. Yet there is that about it, she says, which makes her feel that he looks upon her as a very little girl, which she does not entirely approve. And when he talks to you, you just seem to have any number of things to say, and before you are aware, you are simply rushing along at a mad rate, and—well, you are just glad when he comes, and sorry when he goes—don't you feel that way, Cathy?"

"I don't know, dear, what I feel, except that I—I feel too much."

"Cathy!" impulsively cried the younger woman, starting up and staring at her companion in mild amazement, "Do you—do you love Mister Bill?"

"Ah, yes, yes! Why deny it? Why deny that I am simply helpless? Why deny that I have been fighting against myself for days, and all the while knowing the struggle was useless? I do not seem to possess any strength, any will of my own, where that man is concerned. I—I who fancied myself so strong, am simply carried along, even while I am struggling against it."

"And when did it all begin, Cathy? Please tell me—"

"Ah, dear, don't ask me. I don't even know. I think

he interested me before I knew him—that terrible night out in the mountains. He was so brave and good and tender to those poor people. A woman's heart is not proof against such strength and goodness, my dear. I think he won my respect and admiration that night, and my heart, and all else quickly followed when I came to know him. As I look back I can see that I was going, going, all the while, yet failed to realize that I had been caught in a treacherous current."

"Oh, it is perfectly lovely, Cathy!"

"Don't say that, my dear, unless you wish me misery."

"Why, Cathy, what do you mean? You don't mean —you cannot mean—that Mister Bill does not love you?" she cried, incredulously.

"Yes, dear, that is just what I mean. Is it so difficult to believe—does it really seem so strange?" she asked, with sweet and loving gentleness, smiling into the upturned face of her serious little companion.

"Oh, Cathy, I cannot believe it! You are tired and upset—"

"Yes, dear, I am tired and unstrung, I fear—I am weak to-night. I shall be stronger and braver to-morrow, and for all time. I must always be strong or I shall be miserable."

"Oh, no, no, Cathy! It cannot be! Surely Mister Bill must care for you in return for all the love you have given him. It cannot be that of all the men who would give everything they possess for your love—it simply cannot be that the only one you love has none to give. No, no! I am sure it cannot—it must not be. You are mistaken, Cathy—you don't understand—"

"There, there, dear," she gently interposed, smiling

indulgently at the earnestness of her loyal little companion, "there are things you don't understand. It is all quite hopeless. He does not think me such a bad lot—as a friend, perhaps—but a deeper feeling has never entered his breast. He is far more likely to become interested in Edith, if he has not already. Her sweet, innocent and fresh young life, would appeal to a man of his character who is much too sensible to tolerate the forced and artificial life we lead. Her life is just beginning, and may be moulded into a sweet and lovely womanhood. The parts are all there for his building, and a man may make of her what he will—a companion of whom he may well be proud, and the joy and comfort of his life, or—like thousands of others. Besides, I have much, and he has little—as the world reckons—and he is far too proud to accept more than he has to offer. But there, dear, all this is beside the question."

"And just to think, Cathy, it was only yesterday that you said you were quite sure you never could care enough for any man—"

"Yes, dear, I know! I have said many foolish things, but I knew all the while that I was only deceiving myself—or trying to. When a woman is compelled to whistle to keep up her courage she is grasping at a straw—a poor acknowledgment of weakness and defeat, did she but know."

"Oh, dear, Cathy! Girls are such terribly contradictory creatures. We say such heaps of things, and make no end of resolutions knowing all the while we don't even intend to keep them."

"Ah, dear! the tongue is but a foolish jester, and merely wags at will. But the heart—Ah, the heart!—

is subject to a higher power beyond the will of man—much less a woman. We protest and rebel, but the fact remains, we love without volition of our own, and even against our better judgment. Weak? Unwomanly? Inexcusable? Who shall say? I have no excuse, nor do I seek one."

"Ah, no, Cathy, of course you do not, nor do any of us. We cannot regulate our hearts to the day, the hour, the minute, they shall do our bidding. Ah, our hearts! How treacherous—how loyal! How they let us sleep and dream sweetly on unconscious and careless of all save the intoxication of the moment. Oh, Cathy, I cannot—I will not believe—"

"Ah, my dear, you are inexperienced in the ways of the world, and may you ever be shielded from its rough edges, and never know the sorrows and heartaches it holds for so many. Happiness is not for all. Some must be content with lowly and lonely lives; some must be content to labor for others; some must even give their lives for others. But wherever her lot is cast, the happiness of every woman lies in being true to her womanhood, without which, no king, nor man, nor station, can compensate her for the sacrifice. And in the simple consciousness of her loyalty and obedience to those innate guardians, whose promptings are her safeguard—the only guide a good woman need ever know—will come the great fruition of happiness—the highest and best reward our sex is privileged to know."

"Oh, Cathy! how brave—how good, you are!" impulsively cried the younger woman.

"And now, dear, bright eyes should be closed in slumber," sealing two protesting lips, which returned the

mute token of endearment with another, and another, and yet another, while bright eyes grew dim with tears and a little head nestled closer against the form about which encircling arms had found their way. Good-night was said—one last embrace. "Sweetest dreams, dearest, and may your life be the one long sweet dream of happiness you would make for others, could you but choose the way."

And while the stillness of the night grows heavy, a lonely figure sits before the grate—thinking—watching—yet seeing not the dying embers fade away—flickering—falling—clinging to the last lingering spark of life—fainter—fainter—one last spasmodic leap—darkness over all. Even as the flame of hope in the human breast burns and wanes and flickers, finally dying out, leaving a soul in darkness and despair.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MEN OF IRON NERVE

THE next morning Jack, rushing breathlessly into Waldron's office found Messrs. Bishop and Sutter in comfortable possession, each man tilted back in an easy chair against the wall on opposite sides of the room complacently pulling away at cigars at once conspicuous for their size and color.

"Has Mister Bill been here this morning, or do you expect him soon?" he inquired, with difficulty suppressing the excitement under which he was laboring.

"Mister Bill ain't showed up yet—liable to roll in any minute I reckon, young 'un," said Dave, with careless good nature, between pulls at his weed. "Anythin' special?" he inquired, noting Jack's impatience.

"Very much, Mr. Bishop. I have it pretty straight that they are going to hammer Consolidated Properties this morning, and I came up to tell Mister Bill so that he might not be taken unawares."

"Show! They be goin' to hammer old Consolidated —be they? I 'lowed that when you driv up, young 'un," said Dave, with the most refreshing indifference, scanning the young man through the blue haze in which he had enveloped himself.

"Yes, and it's nine-thirty now. I think he would surely be here if he knew that they were going to make the

drive this morning. It would be very unfortunate if he were not aware of their intentions. Guess I had better look him up," he suggested.

The fleeting seconds while awaiting a reply to his suggestion seemed to the excited youth like a waste of precious time, and he could hardly control his impatience while Dave Bishop with the most exasperating coolness removed the cigar from his mouth, slowly and even more deliberately delivered himself of a prodigious volume of blue smoke, carefully blowing away the last vestige, before he was finally moved to speech.

"I reckon, young 'un, as how Joe Sutter over there, and Dave Bishop right here, stand to lose as much as the next man in this 'ere stampede, and we ain't worryin'. 'Cause why? 'Cause Mister Bill is pintin' the gun, and when he gets ready to let go, we ain't no kind of doubt but the game he's aimin' at is goin' to drop all right enough."

"Yes—yes!" said Jack, impatiently.

"We don't know nothin' about this 'ere round-up, and what's more, we don't want to know nothin' about it—it ain't in our line. Joe and me are jest here on a little pleasure trip and we ain't botherin' our heads about no business. What's the use? We're tenderfeet and we've sense enough to know it."

"I understand, Mr. Bishop. I will see if I can find Mister Bill," said Jack, now thoroughly convinced that it was high time for him to act.

"You see, young 'un," continued Dave, "the chaps that stake the color (gold) and keep the works a-hummin' ain't the ones that put the pictures on paper and raise a great hullabaloo and get the crowd to fightin' and

tumblin' over theirselves like a pack of varmits to get hold of the pesky stuff. They 'tend to their works same as we 'tend to ours, and keep 'em goin' their own way, mostly, I 'low, by throwin' the pack somethin' to gnaw on once in a while jest to keep their courage up to stickin' pint, when they ain't stirrin' 'em up with a long pole and makin' 'em jump sideways to get out of their own way."

"Yes, yes!" cried Jack, in sheer desperation. "Something must surely be wrong—"

"You see, young 'un," continued the imperturbable Dave, "we use them and they use us even if one is bad licker to t'other, and there's no more friction than is nateral to a couple of man-eaters that's bound to bite and scratch each other when t'other ain't lookin'. But there's a sight of trouble soon as a chap takes the notion he can run both claims, and gets the idee that he's the lone pine all by himself. He may stand up straight and stiff like for maybe some time, but he's jest darin' the whole crowd to take a fall out of him. Where there's only one likely piece of timber to whack, there's a sight of axes jest itchin' to get at it, and first one and then another gets in a lick—and maybe some feller two or three—and purty soon old tree gets kind of top heavy, and down he comes all in a heap. Then again it's a mighty likely mark for chain lightnin', and when old Jove lashes out a kick at the big butt—no difference how solid—down comes Mister Tree. A man ain't no harder to bring down, and a kick where it'll do the most good ain't no bad way to do it neither. He has a long ways the best of the tree at that, seein' as how he can pick himself up and go about his business again. May

be sort of stiff and used up like, but he knows more, and is a hanged sight more decent to live with.

"I don't know, young 'un, how this 'ere feller Mister Bill is trailin' is goin' to be brung down—axes or lightnin'—but I mistrust lightnin' will do the job. That's more his way when he has a fight on hand, and kinder looks like he had his coat off in this 'ere scrimmage. You'll see the fur fly purty soon, I reckon. He sent word as how he wanted to see us this mornin', and that's why we're here. You're all right, young 'un. Don't worry about Mister Bill. He'll he here in time no kind of doubt, and if he ain't he'll be where he orter be."

The young man, however, was far from being reassured by these unqualified expressions of confidence on the part of the easy-going Westerner who seemed not to realize the serious nature of the situation.

"How's the little Missus?" inquired Dave, abruptly changing the subject, a broad grin spreading over his rough bronzed face. "There's a rare little filly, young 'un—they don't grow out our way jest her gait. I'd like mighty well to take her back with me, but I'm feared she'd buck and cut up troublesome like. Wouldn't like to give her up nohow, I guess?" he queried, good naturedly.

"Set down and make yourself to home, young 'un—ain't nothin' to worry about," said Joe, quietly amused at the ill-suppressed impatience of the youth which kept him pacing nervously back and forth looking at his watch at short intervals. "Have a smoke?" he ingenuously inquired, offering Jack a cigar which that young man wisely declined to negotiate. "I 'lowed it war a little heavy for your weight. Dave and me likes 'em

as bites, when we don't have our old pipes. We ain't no highfalutin notions, but we sort of agreed we wouldn't smoke our old stokes on this 'ere trip. They don't look none too good, and then again, maybe nobody would care so much about havin' 'em 'round—or us either. We're rough old chaps, and there's a heap of things we don't know, but when we take a shy into another man's country we're as decent as we know how to be same as we expect him to be when he comes on to our section."

A brisk step was heard in the hall and Waldron suddenly appeared, much to Jack's relief. "Hello, Jack! Morning, boys—comfortable, I see!" greeting his friends with cheery good nature. "Wouldn't they give you a cigar, Jack?" he inquired, as he rolled back the cover of his desk. "Personally, I never take any chances with those cigars. Dave occasionally seems to think that I need an emetic, and prescribes one of his dry dopes, which I indulge by proxy through Joe. Then again, Joe would share his happiness with me, and persuades me to accept a stick of his extract of joy, which I promptly hand over to Dave to assist in undermining his constitution," he affably explained, as he glanced over his mail, and manifested no surprise when informed of the object of the young man's visit.

"All right, Jack—much obliged," was his brief reply.

"What do you want of us, Mister Bill?" inquired Dave.

"I called a meeting of the board this morning—two or three questions to be considered. You need not go, Jack. This is not a secret session," he laughed, "merely

an informal discussion. "Before night, gentlemen, you will be richer or poorer men—"

"Did you get us down here to tell us all that?" Dave inquired, rather disgustedly. "You might have waited till night, and then you'd know all about it, for sure."

"Your position is too well taken to admit of argument, David. The thought occurred to me, however, that less embarrassment might result if I told you this morning that your worldly possessions might take wings during the day, than to be compelled to inform you to-night that they had actually flown. Merely a technical difference, to be sure."

"You don't 'pear to be worryin' much yourself. When you get oneasy, time enough for me to get nervous," replied Dave.

"Same here," said Joe.

"What are the views of the board concerning settlement should we succeed in stampeding our opponents—"

"I say give 'em hell!" vigorously declared Dave Bishop, bringing his chair down on the floor with a resounding whack. "I say give 'em enough to keep 'em busy on their own claim 'tending to their own business for a spell, and let other folks alone. Give 'em the same as they give us, and I'll be satisfied. Any man orter be willin' to take that!"

"Sure thing!" chimed Joe.

"We are bound to recognize the fact, however, that in forcing a settlement beyond certain limits, we may lose all that we might gain by more moderate demands. Now is it desirable to take unnecessary risks for the sake of paying old scores?"

"Anything you say goes, Mister Bill," declared

Dave. "We're in this thing to see her through, and we ain't no quitters and no kickers. Then again, we ain't so crazy to corral all the dust in sight. We jest want what belongs to us, and we ain't no objection to purty fair interest, and a leetle somethin' or other, maybe, for our trouble, and I guess we'll manage to get along on that. Howsomever, we stand by you, Mister Bill. The boys are all dead willin' to make or break with you—what's good enough for you is good enough for them."

"If you can manage to land them fellows a few good sockdolagers where they'll do the most good—jest complimentary like, to let 'em know we ain't forgot what they've done for us in the same way—the boys won't offer no objections, and kind of please 'em, seein' as how they ain't here to see the dirt fly," was the frankly expressed opinion of Mr. Sutter.

"Now then, gentlemen, there is another aspect of the case we are also bound to consider," Waldron told them. "Suppose we suddenly find ourselves confronted by an overwhelming force, and it is a case of—well, hands up?"

"Ain't never seen you throw up your hands yet, Mister Bill," said Dave, with supreme assurance.

"Nor me, neither, and I don't cal'late as how I will in this 'ere fracas," Joe opined, with equal complacency.

"Thank you, gentlemen!" laughed Waldron. "Your compliments are as gratifying as they are unnegotiable. The voice of the meeting seems to be unanimous that we give 'em hell—so far as may be consistent with our own safety. Has the board any further suggestions to offer?"

"Nary a one!" said Dave.

"Nope!" assented Joe.

"Very well, gentlemen, the business of the meeting is transacted. Our next official duties will presumably be in the nature of obsequies of our friend the enemy, or —our own. I trust you will be on hand in case I am compelled to offer you up as a sacrifice," he told them, with brutal candor.

The meetings of the full board of directors of this unique company differed little except in the number of participants from the informal affair just recorded. In all respects were they marvels of simplicity. The meetings were attended under protest, and considered very much of a nuisance by the majority of the members. "The doctor ordered—look pleasant and take your medicine," was the oft-repeated reply of the young president to the good natured grumblers. Was it another stamp, another engine, matters of finance or law—of which there were complexities innumerable—this, that, or the other, the questions invariably resolved themselves into "All right, Mister Bill," "Anything you say goes," "Same here," "Me too," with the regularity of a packed caucus. Nevertheless, reports and routine business were strictly and carefully maintained, the president and manager offering in extenuation of his scrupulous business methods that if, by fair means or foul, he should land the works high and dry some fine day, they would at least know how it happened, and be full partners in their misfortunes.

"You see, Jack, we are not long on formalities," Waldron remarked to the young man, who had been watching this impromptu disposition of weighty business af-

fairs with amused interest. "Dave and Joe are great sticklers in matters of parliamentary procedure—on the short side. They believe that brevity is not alone the soul of wit, but the spirit of life as well. They are thoroughly convinced that even fractions of seconds are conducive to life and health, especially when opinions differ as to the relative value of two lives. Theirs is not a theory, but a fact—themselves the evidence."

These offhand observations were briskly and affably delivered in the intervals between telephone calls, despatching of several messenger boys and rapid scanning of papers, all without apparent haste or uncertainty of thought or action, but rather, creating the impression of greater capacity should occasion require, which caused the young man, who had never seen his friend under stress of business, no little wonder and admiration. The self-possessed indifference of the social man had given way to a briskness and a decision of voice and manner intensely suggestive that he held himself and his business well in hand, and was awaiting the onslaught of the enemy at his pleasure.

Notwithstanding all this, the young man had grave doubts as to the outcome of the impending conflict, as he knew only too well the countless difficulties and unforeseen obstacles continually arising to frustrate the best laid plans. He could but feel that the contending forces were vastly unequal; in short, the old, old story of insider against outsider, and precedent had long decreed but one almost inevitable result—demoralization, if not total annihilation of him who rashly assailed these well-nigh invincible forces in their own stronghold.

Nor could he understand the strange and seemingly

reckless indifference of these men as to the outcome of this struggle. The admitted ignorance of the two (and others not in evidence) trusting their all so implicitly to the keeping of a man but little older than himself, to fight a financial battle involving hundreds of thousands of dollars against one of the great money powers of the country, seemed to him little less than blind faith; while the supreme indifference and even levity of that one in these trying moments preceding the beginning of that struggle was, to say the least, ill timed and must certainly be attributed to a misconception of the strength of the forces he was pitted against.

The young man too little understood the rigorous training these men had undergone to intelligently apprehend the cause of this blind faith and careless indifference. He was not aware that every nerve, bone and sinew in their bodies had been innured to hardship, and their mentalities steeled to self-control through years of conflict with men and elements in their wildest and most turbulent forms. These men carried their lives in their hands (so to speak) and the same fearless hearts that had enabled them to contend against greater odds for heavier stakes would not fail them in their present struggle to gain possession of their own, and perhaps mete out just retribution to the despoilers of their rights and property. Or, should failure be their portion, the same indomitable wills would place them on their feet ready for another and a harder struggle. Such happenings were but incidents in their lives, not recklessly sought, nor yet timidly avoided, and what to many might be pain and crucifixion, was to them not without a cer-

tain zest and pleasure, so thoroughly had their natures become attuned to the extremes of life—a cultivated taste, and like their cigars, must "bite" to afford the keenest satisfaction.

"Lining up!" Jack remarked, sententiously, noting the time, as the ticker emitted a few ominous ticks. "They'll be off in a couple of minutes."

"All right, Jack," said Waldron, "stand by and let us know how they get away. If she begins to slide give Dave and Joe the word. They will have urgent business with a couple of holes in the ground, if I am not mistaken. Any old pea-pod will be about my size," he added, under his breath, as he seated himself at his desk.

"They're off!" Jack suddenly announced. "Here she comes—first rattle out of the box—five hundred N. M. C. P. at thirty-nine—three hundred—five hundred at an eighth — two hundred — one hundred — same — same — three hundred at a quarter—five hundred at a half," he called, sometimes continuously, and again at intervals, as the tape recorded the transactions, "and she's holding all right!" he declared, continuing to call off varying quantities and prices.

"That's right, Jack—that's what I want to know," said Waldron.

To the young man this clashing of financial forces was fraught with deep significance; he viewed it from a totally different standpoint than did the older men. To him it was the natural order of things—the way of life and living—and to the victor would belong the spoils. It was his education—the training he was undergoing each day—the routine of his business. As he eagerly scanned the characters on the tape his flushed face and

snapping eyes betrayed the excitement under which he was laboring. In spirit he was at the side of the arena. He could see the crowd of excited and perspiring men pulling, pushing, and elbowing each other about, the while they gesticulated and shouted wildly and hoarsely in their frantic efforts to make themselves heard above the deafening din. He could hear the sharp piercing cries of triumph rising above the groans of chagrin and yells of derision as the conflict waged fiercer and fiercer. He could see their flushed and pallid faces taking on a deeper hue as the battle turned for or against them. He could read in their strained and set features the fearful struggle of overwrought mentalities—some weak and protesting, others bold and defiant—each intent upon the conquest of his fellow man. He breathed the excitement—he was one with them; he was on the side that was shouting triumphantly today, but tomorrow—let tomorrow care for itself.

The spirit of the ages when man could view with equanimity the rending of his fellow-beings by savage beasts was not extinct. He had progressed to the extent of descending into the pit and fighting his brother to the death. The youth was imbued with the spirit of the times.

"They're coming along with a clatter—just falling over themselves to head off old Consolidated," he cried.

"They will discover a dark horse in the race before long at the pace they have set," Waldron quietly observed from behind his desk.

"That's the Burrows combination trying to make a runaway race of it—that's his system. He goes after the crowd from the jump, and runs them to a standstill, and

then comes on and wins as he likes. But he's found a pace-maker today," cried Jack, exultantly.

"They are simply playing into our hands to force the pace," was Waldron's brief comment.

"Hoop! But they're holding a hot pace!" cried Jack, beside himself with excitement. "The harder they lash her the faster she goes—she's taken the bit in her teeth and is running away with them. Forty-one, Mister Bill—half — three-quarters — seven-eighths — forty-two!" he called, in quick succession, dancing up and down in his excitement. Your men are taking it in as fast as it comes along. Forty-three now, and slowing up a little. They have just about discovered the dark horse."

An interval of comparative quiet followed the first fierce onslaught on the stock, which continued with periods of slight cessation for a half hour or more. Dave and Joe smoked on with serene imperturbability, seemingly oblivious of the fact that a furious conflict was being waged not far distant upon the result of which depended, in no small measure, their worldly possessions. "There's plenty of games we know a thing or two about, but this 'ere ain't one of 'em, and we ain't chippin' and botherin' the man that's playin' the hand," Dave condescended to remark in further extenuation of their negative attitude.

"They're cutting loose again!" cried Jack. "Getting their second wind and coming at us once more! It's simply raining Consolidated Properties. And still they come! Help! Help! Mercy!" he fairly shouted, unable to control his excitement.

"What!" he cried, scanning the tape incredulously, "is

this my little railroad bobbing up and down like a new spring bonnet—the N. M. C.—Mister Bill?"

"The same," briefly replied Waldron. "Want to part with your pictures at present quotations?"

"Slowing down again!" Jack announced, after a while. "Mr. James T. Burrows will begin to think that the moral law is a stern reality—if nothing breaks."

"His acquaintance with anything pertaining thereto is so extremely limited, that he must needs butt up against it a few times before he realizes that the Burrows code is not in operation in this particular transaction," Waldron grimly observed, apparently more to himself than for the edification of his companions.

Whatever may have been the condition of the enemy, Waldron, to all appearances, held his forces well in hand. He had made numerous rapid calculations, offered occasional replies to Jack's running fire of information and comment, and was ever ready with clear and concise replies for his brokers, confined for the most part to "yes," "no" or "all right," delivered seemingly without the slightest doubt or hesitation. Whatever the outcome of the struggle, be it said to his credit that he fought a good fight, and in all ways showed himself to be as cool under fire as the most intrepid veteran of finance.

"Any idee, Mister Bill, who started that 'ere slide to workin'? Some purty toler'ble rocks 'pear to be comin' down," Dave was finally moved to inquire.

"Do you remember that night over on Devil's Ridge that we treed the cat, and you brought her down?" inquired Waldron, completing a calculation, before interrogating the other by way of reply.

"Sartin, I do."

"Did you see her?"

"Can't say as how I did, Mister Bill, but I spied a couple of green lights, and I 'lowed the rest of the cat couldn't be far off, and I let go—and she dropped."

"Felt tolerably sure of bringing her down?"

"Fair to middlin', I reckon."

"Well Dave, that is just about the present state of affairs. I followed several trails, and finally succeeded in treeing the game. The game, however, was not aware of the fact, and is only now discovering that it is up a tree. Like our cat, it cannot come down, and the top of the tree is the limit in the other direction. I have let go, and I expect something to drop before long."

"Moving again!" Jack announced. "They are throwing it at you in blocks—thousand—two thousand—three thousand—but it's moving steadily up—forty-five now, Mister Bill," he cried with increasing excitement.

"They are trying to break our backs in a final effort—it's their only hope," quietly replied Waldron. "If my calculations are correct they have thrown over all the stock in their possession and are now selling something they do not possess—and which they will find considerable difficulty in delivering," he added, significantly.

"Forty-seven!" cried Jack. "They have stirred up a swarm of bees with all their racket and brought the dear public in to enjoy a sip of their honey—the lambs are avenging themselves today."

"Their assistance has been most timely—they will be duly rewarded," Waldron briefly observed.

"Ah, I see!" laughed Jack. "While you were quietly cornering the stock and steadily raising the price you

were creating an interest on the part of the public that brought it in to take a hand when you began to jump the price up today—it was the signal for all hands to go aboard. Result—Mr. Burrows has been caught in his own trap. He must have been surprised at the ravenous appetite the public suddenly developed for Consolidated Properties. Forty-nine—and still going."

"I reckon some feller's tongue may be hangin' out about now, Mister Bill?" Joe suggested, as the other concluded a conversation over the telephone.

"None visible here, Joe."

"How is it, Mister Bill, if the varmints get good and cornered, can they sneak off into any holes where you can't get at 'em?" inquired bloodthirsty Dave Bishop.

"Well, yes, Dave, such a possibility does exist; but the holes into which they would be compelled to slink are rather disagreeable and ill smelling places of refuge, and they will stand considerable prodding before turning tail."

"Stopped short, Mister Bill!" Jack suddenly cried, closely scanning the tape fearful lest something had escaped him. "What's happened?" he demanded, quite startled.

"They have suddenly discovered themselves trapped," coolly replied Waldron, "or," pausing with ominous suggestiveness, "they have scented mischief and stopped short on the very brink of the pitfall."

That the enemy had been beaten in the preliminary skirmish was now apparent. The temporary control of the market had been wrested from him—the sudden withdrawal of his forces the acknowledgment. So far all was well, but unless he had walked well into the trap

laid for him no permanent advantage had been gained and he would be the same old enemy goaded to greater fury and desperation in thus being balked of his prey. For a brief interval no word was spoken. The ticker clattered on spasmodically. Each man was busy with his own thoughts; each realized that for better or worse —for victory or defeat—the deciding blow had been struck. But one, better than the others, knew the meaning of that victory or defeat. The sense of his responsibility came suddenly home to him; for the moment he was as the gambler who stakes his money, his home, his reputation—his all—on the turn of a card—and that card is withheld from him.

"Shootin' all over, young 'un—or loadin' up for another scrimmage?" asked Dave, finally breaking the silence.

"She's climbing up fast on slow sales—how is that for a paradox? Guess they threw a fit when they found they couldn't budge old Consolidated, and your men are putting her up where the dead won't be tempted to rise until you are ready to take the corpse off the ice," said Jack.

"Young 'un," laughed Dave, "you know a lingo all your own like Joe and me, and if you say the word we'll take you out on the range with us and make a man of you."

"There's a paradox for you, Jack," said Waldron, considerably amused at the rather questionable compliment bestowed upon the young man.

"Joe and me are goin' out to stretch up a bit, Mister Bill. You think as how we might get a nigh squint at that 'ere corpse?" inquired Dave.

"I am not quite sure that the corrupt body is prepared

to admit its defeat, but if you happen around in the course of an hour or so the ghost may be walking—provided that life is really extinct," said Waldron, with due conservatism.

"That's right, Mister Bill. You ain't never sure of some chaps till they're planted. We'll be back, sartin, sure."

CHAPTER XXIX

WHO THE DEVIL ARE YOU?

SOME time later Waldron, the sole occupant of his office, was busily engaged at his desk, when the door was suddenly thrown open, and four gentlemen ushered themselves in without ceremony. The foremost, none other than Mr. Burrows—evidently in no very amiable frame of mind—followed by Mr. Morrison, Mr. Lowe and Mr. Chadeller, in the order named. The entrance of these gentlemen seemed not to surprise the lone occupant of the office, nor to interest him to the extent of taking his attention from the array of figures before him.

"I wish to see the President of Consolidated Properties—Burrows is my name," that gentleman announced, somewhat pompously.

"Yes, sir," replied the individual addressed, apparently not deeply impressed by the declaration.

"My business is important—I am in something of a hurry, young man," the portly financier impatiently declared.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Burrows?" was the affable inquiry.

"My business is with the President of the company—I wish to see him."

"Your wish is gratified, sir," replied Waldron, laying

down his pen, and settling back in his chair, "How can I serve you?"

"Your pardon, sir—I had expected to find an older man," replied Mr. Burrows, unbending somewhat, and manifestly surprised as he recognized the man before him. "We have called upon you, sir," he continued, with characteristic assurance, "in reference to the stock of your company. You are doubtless aware there has been something of a skirmish in the stock this morning—taken quite an upward turn in fact. There seems to be a temporary shortage of the stock, and we wish to arrange with you for use, or outright purchase, of sufficient to tide us over the present embarrassment. In the meantime, we may be able to come to some understanding whereby each may serve the best interests of the other in future transactions.

"We are not selling, Mr. Burrows—we are buying."

"Ah, I see. It is your people who have run the corner? Your brokers were rather noncommittal as to the identity of their principals. Not so bad, after all," he laughed, forcing a certain assumption of levity. "Rather fortunate on the whole, since we can kill two birds with one stone—arrange this little matter of the present, as well as a basis for future operations. The time is now ripe for a good turn—"

"One moment, Mr. Burrows," Waldron quietly interposed. "Matters may be somewhat simplified if you are made to understand that The Consolidated Properties are now managing their own affairs—exclusively. It has been considered advisable for good and sufficient reasons to take the stock practically off the market, at least for the present, and to that end we are buying—not selling."

The surprise of the other visitors as they recognized the man with whom they were compelled to deal was even more marked than in the case of Mr. Burrows, and if not positively embarrassing, was far from reassuring. Mr. Chadeller was not only surprised, but visibly annoyed, and for a moment seemed undecided whether to beat a retreat, or to stand his ground, but he finally set himself to pacing back and forth across the opposite side of the office.

"We have called upon you, my dear sir," replied Mr. Burrows with his most impressive dignity, "to arrange an amicable adjustment of the matter whereby you will profit not less than ourselves, and you will find upon looking the situation over carefully that our interests are too closely allied to warrant, or even to permit you to ignore our propositions—"

"We evidently do not understand each other, Mr. Burrows," Waldron again quietly but firmly interposed. "I will endeavor to make myself perfectly clear. You have favored me with your presence simply because no other course is open to you. You have fired your last shot, and instead of hauling down your flag like men and asking for terms of surrender, you would have me believe that you are doing me a very great favor by crawling out of the corner in which you have so unexpectedly found yourselves, and where I am holding you like rats in a trap. Failing in this, you would intimidate me by a bluff, which only too plainly for your purpose echoes the hollowness of your knowledge that the game is up, and you are simply grasping at the last straw, which you do not flatter me by inferring is my timidity and credulity. Am I clear, gentlemen?"

"Surely, sir," replied Mr. Burrows, with considerable warmth, "you are laboring under a misapprehension of the conditions—you simply do not grasp the situation in all its bearings. As a matter of fact, we are far more necessary to you in this matter, than are you to us. You have a great amount of stock on your hands, and bargained for, which is practically without value, as representing substantial equivalent. Your mills are closed and,—to be perfectly frank—your company and property worked out flat, which you also know, if you are well informed, and will admit the actual conditions. It is, therefore, manifestly to your advantage to unload this stock while you are able to take a flattering profit, and we can assist you to do this to our mutual advantage."

"Notwithstanding which, the company elects to take the chances of managing its own affairs," said Waldron, with quiet decision. "You have chosen in times past to force your assistance upon us. We have decided to dispense with your attentions, and have adopted the most effectual means of ridding ourselves once and for all of associates not to our liking. I don't mind telling you that the mills were shut down yesterday for your especial benefit. You bit—ran away with the line. I don't mind telling you also that I have been working for several weeks to bring about this particular result, and I *don't* need to tell you how well I have succeeded."

Rage—purple, ungovernable rage—appeared in the rapidly changing expressions of Mr. Burrows' face as he gazed at the young man who had so boldly defied him, too surprised for the moment to give expression to the conflict of passion that shook his ponderous frame. Was he, the great and proud man of finance, to go down in

defeat before this youthful stranger? Was he to be ignominiously humbled before the world—his world—where he ruled with a mighty power, and where he had come to regard himself as well nigh invincible? In that one brief moment the long line of his unbroken victories on which he was wont to pride himself seemed to pass before him like mocking spectres of his erstwhile greatness—they were as naught compared to this one defeat. He could never live it down. His name was a power—it was synonymous with success; his was the magic touch which brought victory out of defeat. He gloried in his power, he exulted in his success. He was jealous of his reputation as a successful financier. His ruling passion was to become the acknowledged leader—the high potentate—in the world where money was king, and where mankind was but the plaything of its caprice.

He had mounted high on the ladder of his ambition—he was well towards the topmost rung; but a few steps more and he would reach the lofty position to which his eyes had so long been turned, and towards which he had steadily climbed with that indomitable perseverance which took no heed of obstacles, and recognized no law but the law of desire—the gratification of his selfish ambitions. And now—now with one swift and almost incomprehensible stroke the structure on which he had expended his life's best efforts, and on which he rested in fancied security, was about to be struck from under him. Instinctively he realized that he had over-reached himself at last. In that one fateful moment he knew that he had reached the turning point in his career and that his ambitions were never to be realized. As his character had contained the elements of his strength,

it had also contained the elements of his weakness; a greater law than he knew was at work, and the man before him was but the instrument of its power. He was face to face with justice—stern, uncompromising justice. He recognized it—he knew he was beaten. He even felt his littleness as a man compared with this young stranger whose unflinching gaze held his own and seemed to read him through and through—the very smallness of his nature was laid bare even to himself. Whipped though he was, he could not tamely submit. The animal in him must find expression—he bellowed.

"You don't know me young man! You have a great deal to learn, let me tell you—you are only a boy in this business," he thundered, shaking his massive fist. "In the temporary advantage you have gained simply because no attention has been paid to your movements with your whipper-snapper mines you think that the game is yours. It is only just begun—you hear me—just begun. Before you have done congratulating yourself you will find the ground pulled from under your feet, and you will be begging for mercy where now you fling back a well-intentioned proffer of assistance. Who the devil are you, who thinks to come here and dictate terms to men old enough to be your father? Who are you, I say? I want to know you, young man, and I'll teach you a lesson—"

"I'll tell you who I am," the other flashed back, his voice and maner undergoing a sudden change, as he advanced towards Mr. Burrows with no uncertain movement, causing that gentleman to pause abruptly in his speech and fall back a step or two, for even in his anger he had no idea of measuring strength with this young

stalwart. "I'll tell you who I am, Mr. Burrows, since you have expressed such an enthusiastic desire to know; and you, Mr. Chadeller, having also manifested considerable curiosity on this same subject, may be interested," paying his respects to that gentleman. "William Waldron, is my name, Mr. Burrows. Charles L. Waldron, a man you ruined and sent to his grave by your damnable schemes and unscrupulous methods that make an honest man but a puppet in your clutches, was my father. Before we have done with each other I venture to say that your desire to know me will be gratified beyond your most sanguine expectations. That is how I fear you, Mr. Burrows."

"And so after many years the son has returned to avenge the father—true to fiction, indeed!" sneeringly replied Mr. Burrows, too surprised at this unexpected turn of affairs to maintain his belligerent attitude. "My dealings with your father, sir, I would have you know, were legitimate—entirely legitimate—as are all my dealings. No man can say to the contrary—my record speaks for itself," he strenuously insisted, yet rather more on the defensive than might have been expected from him.

"Codes differ, Mr. Burrows. Some manage to evade that which they richly deserve, and are successful men —others less fortunate, are rogues," replied Waldron, very shortly, evidently not in an argumentative frame of mind. "I have not, as you suggest, returned in the role of avenger. However, as it was to be, I would rather see you, of all men, in the particular position you now occupy—my duty is less disagreeable."

"Well, what do you ask?" growled the discomfited financier, with exceedingly poor grace.

"I don't ask anything. My dealings with you, sir, are in the form of demands. Were I in a position only to ask, you would not trouble yourself to inquire," replied Waldron, with cool composure, meeting the other on his own ground.

"Consolidated Properties are now quoted at seventy," said Mr. Burrows, scanning the tape. "You will make us a basis of settlement considerably less than that figure —the quotation is a mere detail," he declared, with impressive assurance.

"Hardly, Mr. Burrows—in fact, not anything like the present quotation. The quotation, as you say, is a mere detail, and will shortly be higher—very much higher. I can make it a hundred, two hundred, three hundred or five hundred, if I choose, as you very well know."

"Do you mean to rob me?" roared the outraged financier, his anger instantly at white heat.

"If that is your interpretation when you apply the same treatment to others in a similar position to yourself, I have no objection," replied Waldron, indifferently. "Another interpretation, however, might be that I propose to recover some of the money you have taken from us at various times, some recompense for trouble and annoyances, interest—"

"I won't stand it, sir—I won't stand it! I'll see you hanged before I'll submit to any such outrage! I'll see you—"

"All this is entirely aside from the point at issue, Mr. Burrows," interposed Waldron, stemming an increased outburst of anger on the part of the infuriated gentleman. "My brokers are in possession of the terms of settlement. You may arrange the matter with them or not, as you

choose. Of the alternative, you are well aware. Within an hour from your refusal of settlement the telegraph will tell the world of the unenviable position Burrows & Company have made for themselves. Possibly an extra or two may be issued in your honor, and every news urchin in the country will cry your—"

"I don't believe you could pay for the stock if we delivered it! I don't believe—"

"Your position certainly behooves you to make the experiment, Mr. Burrows, and when we fail you will be relieved of an embarrassing situation," Waldron once more interposed, to the evident discomfort not only of Mr. Burrows, but of his faithful followers, who up to this time had refrained from taking any active part in the conversation, and to whom it was now apparent that their purpose was not being subserved by the bluffs and threats of their angry leader.

"Surely, Mr. Waldron," said Mr. Morrison, in his suavest tones, "surely there must be some way to an amicable adjustment of this matter. Can you afford, even though you may possess some temporary advantage, to entirely ignore the proposition we are making you? The arrangements we suggest will make you a great deal of money—a very great deal—which your directors may not feel inclined to rashly cast aside. I have no doubt that money is a consideration to them as well as to us all," smiling blandly, seemingly well satisfied that he had advanced an incontrovertible argument.

"My directors are in full accord with me in this matter, Mr. Morrison," replied Waldron, with cold formality.

"We are sometimes carried away by the impetuosity

of youth," continued Mr. Morrison, apparently not too well pleased with the result of his first effort. "Youth is the time of hope and confidence and we are prone to over-estimate our strength in the light of some slight success achieved. We older men have long since learned the lesson that youthful impetuosity and over confidence teaches, and we are satisfied to accept that which comes within our reach today, rather than to build castles in the air for future occupancy, only to find them crumbled to pieces by forces we could not foresee. Perhaps, sir," pausing for a moment and smiling with elderly indulgence, "you have men of mature years on your board of directors whose ideas would not differ from those which I have expressed, and who—to use a homely simile—would prefer a bird in the hand to several in the bush. We have not talked the matter over among ourselves, but I am quite sure we could make it to your interest—your personal interest, understand—if you were to favor this idea with your directors, which will net you a very handsome sum entirely apart from the original deal in which your company will profit none the less."

"I also had a similar thought in mind," said Mr. Lowe, with patronizing affability. "Mr. Waldron has shown himself a young man possessed of most exceptional abilities, and I am thoroughly convinced that we should make him some very substantial inducements to combine forces with us. All things considered, he seems a man peculiarly adapted to our particular requirements. Young blood—we need young blood to assist in handling the tremendous enterprises which are now the order of the day in these strenuous times of ours. And I may also add—and in this, gentlemen, I am sure I but voice your

heartiest sentiments," deferring to his companions, "in forming business relations with us, Mr. Waldron also becomes one of us socially, and I trust," smiling benignantly upon that young man, "he will not decide hastily, but will give the matter further and very serious consideration."

"Thank you, gentlemen—thank you!" replied Waldron, regarding the men with something of amused pity and contempt. "I could not possibly consider your propositions for two reasons—the first annuls the second, and the second you would hardly comprehend."

"We have a fairly good understanding of the commonplaces, Mr. Waldron, and I dare say we shall be able to grasp your meaning," replied Mr. Burrows, gravely sarcastic.

"Well, then, the first, because I agree with Mr. Morrison, perfectly—I have too good a possibility in my hand to drop for several in the bush. You doubtless understand that without difficulty, Mr. Burrows. As I said before, the first annuls the second. Know then, that associated with me in this enterprise are men of the mountains, rough fellows all, but true as steel. These men have entrusted their all to me with implicit confidence that I will look after their interests to the best of my ability, and—this, gentlemen, will be the anomaly to you—your combined wealth doubled and trebled would be no inducement for me to make one move that I did not honestly believe was for the best interests of all concerned. Your gold would not repay me for betraying their confidence. I take no credit to myself—I don't know any other way to figure the general problem. I simply don't know how to hold gold at a higher value than I

hold my self respect. When I sacrifice that, then shall I consider myself your equal and prepared to listen to your glittering schemes of business, your suave blandishments for social distinction, drink your wines, and rate myself a bully good fellow according to your peculiar standards. Gentlemen, I consider your propositions not only an insult to me as a man, but an exceedingly small and cheap estimate upon my business perspicacity. The former I might overlook, considering the source, but the latter is far too grave an offense to be lightly condoned," he told them, with a grim humor that accorded well with the equally grim sarcasm of his words.

Altogether the gentlemen had received a most uncomfortable shock as they realized the utter futility of attempting to work their influence over the man who compelled not only a certain respect for himself as a man, but feelings akin to fear by the power he held over them.

"W-h-o-o-p! W-h-o-o-p!" suddenly rang out two blood-curdling yells which seemed to cause the walls and ceiling to vibrate and give back another, and yet another of their kind, creating no little dismay among the occupants of the room, who were thus rudely made aware of the presence of two very animated specimens of Western life and vigor. Dave and Joe had entered the office unobserved, and the concluding remarks of their young friend struck a responsive chord in their robust bosoms, to which they gave prompt and informal expression.

"Solemn enough to be corpses! Don't see as they look no different from any dead men as come to life and sorry they did," said Joe, scanning the gentlemen curiously with his sharp eyes.

"I reckon, Mister Bill, seein' as how they've finished

their business they're about ready to go down the hist," said Dave, with suggestive emphasis, which query the gentlemen answered for themselves by making as hasty an exit as their dignity—or what remained of the superabundance they brought with them—would permit. All except Mr. Chadeller, who throughout the interview had maintained a discreet silence, seemingly not vitally interested in the particular matter under discussion.

"I feel, Mr. Waldron, that I owe you an apology," he said, not without embarrassment, as he advanced toward that gentleman, not quite sure of his reception. "I was not aware—"

"You have business with me, Mr. Chadeller?" Waldron inquired, very courteously.

"Yes. The fact is, I am also short a small amount of your stock. I do not feel that I am entitled to any courtesies at your hands. I can only hope that you will feel inclined to accord me the consideration of one business man to another. It is only fair to myself to say, however, that my connection with this affair is entirely apart from the gentlemen with whom you have been dealing. Nor have I been connected with any previous transactions in the stock. I merely took a flyer this morning at the suggestion of Mr. Burrows, and immediately found myself in trouble—the result of following the advice of a friend, and going outside of one's own specialties."

"Very well, Mr. Chadeller, I will instruct my brokers to settle with you at the market, which I trust will be satisfactory."

"Entirely so, and I thank you for the consideration. I trust there are no hard feelings between us, Mr. Waldron?"

"None, Mr. Chadeller," briefly replied the other, resuming his chair.

"I hope we shall see more of you in the future. I knew your father well, and entertained a very great respect for him—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Chadeller," said Waldron, turning in his chair, and regarding the other fixedly for a moment, "I am precisely the same man today as last evening, and upon one other occasion when we chanced to meet. You were pleased to place your stamp of disapproval upon me as a man. By that standard I prefer to be judged rather than by any former position which may or may not have been mine. The privilege was yours—I abide your decision. Our relations are purely business and, I believe—concluded."

Good-day, thus invited, was promptly offered and echoed.

" 'Pears to me a good wallopin' wouldn't do him no more harm than the rest of 'em—you let that feller off purty easy, Mister Bill," said Dave, rather disgustedly, as the door closed after the gentleman.

"Yes, Dave. He is not one of the particular and select coterie, and we are not holding a man up simply because we can put a gun at his head," replied Waldron.

"Maybe you're right, Mister Bill, maybe you're right, but I allus believe in puttin' your weight on a rattler when you've got him sort of handy like under your heel. Don't do no harm to nobody, and might do a sight of good."

CHAPTER XXX

MAN TO MAN

IT'S the reigning sensation! The evening papers fairly bristle with excitement and importance. Brought down a bunch—got them all. Thought you might like to become acquainted with yourself. You are supplied with a life history gratis, I imagine. You are the wonder of the age—the Napoleon of Finance—in big type, if you please. They have unfortunately detracted from your good looks—worked in a convenient baseball player for the phenomenal young financier, I dare say. You don't seem any the worse for your experience," said Jack, critically regarding his guest, as he admitted him into the familiar living room of his home.

"No appreciable disability to date," Waldron briefly replied, seemingly not imbued with the enthusiasm of his young friend.

"The street seems to think the whole affair a huge joke on Burrows and his crowd. Mighty few are sorry that a reef has finally been taken in the old man's sails. Just to think of the old fellow walking up to the captain's office and writing his little check for big figures, and settling like any of the small fry. It's a new experience for him; he will never forgive you, but I guess you can stand it. Lots of people know you—remember you as a

boy—knew your father. Oh! you will have plenty of friends, and they won't be long in making their appearance. I guess that was why you were willing to come down here tonight—to get away from the crowd camping on your trail?" queried the young man, suddenly realizing that his remarks were not receiving the attention he deemed them worthy.

"Partially, and partially because I wished to see Mrs. Davidge. I have reason to believe that her affairs are more or less involved in the general transaction. I understood last evening that she was coming down today with the girls."

"Yes, they will be here on the next train. Did you notice that my little railroad developed considerable strength, or didn't you think of it in the general excitement?"

"I managed to keep it in sight, considering that it was a part of the deal," said Waldron, smiling at the young man's enthusiasm.

"So that was what brought it so suddenly to life?"

"Yes. Consolidated Properties rescued the railroad from bankruptcy, and owns the controlling interest. From now on the railroad will share in the prosperity of the whole district."

"Even at the present quotations my mother has more than sufficient to pay the mortgage, and I suppose the stock will continue to increase in value, will it not?"

"Not an unreasonable supposition."

"And just to think of that despised little railroad bobbing up like a jack-in-the-box! Mr. Burrows probably wishes that he had held the stock a little longer. By the way, mother has been formally notified that arrange-

ments have been made with Mr. Chadeller to assume the responsibility of the mortgage. He has agreed to carry it for a year, and altogether Mr. Burrows seemed to consider the matter very well disposed of. As he never stood to lose any of his own money, he could afford to make a liberal discount to Mr. Chadeller, and that shrewd gentleman sees prospective profits in the rapidly increasing value of the property, and is content to bide his time."

"Your conclusions are fairly well based, I should say, young man. But if you will pardon the change from a very interesting to a very commonplace subject—what size collars do you wear?"

"Come upstairs, and I will see what I can do for you," laughed Jack, leading the way.

At Waldron's request, the two had come down to Jack's home, Jack preceding his guest by an hour or more. The day had certainly been a most eventful one for the young financier, and he might well feel elated with his success. He had come out of the West a stranger and alone; he had boldly and fearlessly invaded the stronghold of the enemy; he had quietly and deliberately laid his plans of campaign, and had fought a sharp and decisive engagement resulting in the utter and complete rout of his opponents. He not only had made himself and those immediately associated with him richer by many thousands of dollars, but had placed their property beyond the reach of the scheming and unscrupulous individuals that had preyed upon it for months, and had taught them a lesson they would not soon forget. His name was on thousands of lips this night for not alone in the great city but far and wide the telegraph had sped

the news of the big corner and the few conspicuous facts concerning the young man to whom was due the credit of its conception and execution.

In the city he was eagerly sought. Friends of his boyhood from whose recollection he had long since faded were eager to renew the acquaintance; others who knew him not were no less anxious to make his acquaintance. Reporters were lying in wait for him to obtain more detailed information concerning himself and the affair for their morning papers. But he was not to be found and he might as well have disappeared from off the earth for all the information to be obtained of him this night. The penalty of success had begun to clamor for an early reckoning.

"In this way, Mrs. Winston, you will be relieved of all embarrassment and responsibility, and well rid of the mortgage once and for all." The speaker was Mr. Chadeller, addressing Mrs. Winston, as they entered the living room, continuing a conversation begun in an adjoining room. "As I have explained, I am willing to exchange the mortgage for the stock, and take chances of its becoming of value to me sooner or later."

The joy of the good woman when she finally grasped the full meaning of this splendid offer was beyond her power to express. The possibility of being so easily rid of the dark cloud hanging over the little home like an impending fate was too good to be true. In the excitement occasioned by this unexpected piece of good fortune she had taken the package of certificates from the little tin box in which they had reposed since coming into her possession, and was about to hand them to Mr. Chadeller, when Jack's admonition to take good care

of them suddenly occurred to her. To be sure, Jack had cautioned her to guard them well, yet what better purpose could they serve than to be exchanged for the dread mortgage—she knew of none. She led the way into the living room expecting to find Jack. She was not aware of the arrival of his friend, nor had Mr. Chadeller any idea that either was in the house. Jack was rarely at home except on Sundays, and an occasional Saturday afternoon, and to a knowledge of this fact might safely be attributed Mr. Chadeller's presence in the house at this particular time. He advanced some further reasons why the exchange should be consummated without delay; indeed, it was all perfectly simple, the mere matter of Jack's approval the only obstacle which, after all, was not essential, and he would be no less pleased to be so easily rid of the troublesome mortgage.

"Y-e-s, Mr. Chadeller," she finally assented, "it seems quite clear that I should accept your very kind and generous offer. I have here the certificates, and if you really feel justified in making the exchange I will surrender them to you," tears springing into the good woman's eyes, "and you cannot understand, Mr. Chadeller, how very grateful I am—how grateful we all are—"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Winston," a voice interposed. "Permit me," the same voice continued, its owner advancing and extending his hand to relieve her of the package on which the other man was about closing his fingers.

So deeply had both been absorbed with the serious matter engaging their attention that two men had slowly descended the stairs, and one had even advanced leisurely across the room before his presence was discovered. Mrs.

Winston was not a little surprised and confused by this strange proceeding, yet she surrendered the papers without protest—the whole affair from beginning to end was beyond her comprehension.

Consternation was the portion of Mr. Chadeller, and could he have quietly dropped through the floor, he would doubtless have made such informal disposition of himself. Surely surprises had been his portion overmuch—an avenging fate in the person of the man before him seemed to be hard upon his trail.

"You may safely entrust the matter with me for the moment, Mrs. Winston," said Waldron, "and Jack," addressing that young man, "I will have a few words with the gentleman," whereupon mother and son withdrew, leaving the two men alone. The one, thoughtfully contemplating the package of certificates he held in his hand, the other, waiting with ill-concealed discomfiture the next move on the part of the man who had arranged this private interview. Several times he essayed to break the embarrassing silence, but his half-formed words failed of audible expression.

The situation was becoming positively unbearable when Waldron slowly raised his eyes and studied the other curiously for a brief moment before breaking the silence. "Mr. Chadeller," he finally said, "I dealt with you to-day as a man—one man with another. I find I made a mistake. You are incapable of appreciating such treatment. I should have *bitten.*"

"I don't understand you, sir! My business here is entirely legitimate and straightforward. If I choose to exchange the mortgage for the stock, and to take chances of making a few dollars or of losing a few—perhaps all

—and at the same time do my friends a good turn, I fail to see how I am open to censure. It is simply a matter of business in which they are relieved of an obligation, while I may profit, or I may lose. Do you blame me?"

"No! I—pity you!" said Waldron, with fine contempt.

"Sir!" Mr. Chadeller indignantly exclaimed. "I am well within my rights and privileges in this matter, I would have you understand," he vigorously declared, placing himself at once on the defensive.

"To be sure you are. It is your privilege to barter with Mr. Burrows for this mortgage which, as a matter of fact, is not worth the paper despoiled in its making, which you know, as well as he. It is also your privilege to tire of your bargain, and seek to exchange this same worthless mortgage for the certificates you deemed equally worthless, but which have suddenly acquired value unknown to the woman from whom you would now secure them by misrepresentation—all of which as you say, is legitimate. You are to be congratulated upon your business perspicacity—your conception is entirely correct. The stock will become exceedingly valuable—is valuable now—while your mortgage will depreciate very materially. The weak point in your calculations is in the time of your coming. You are early by several hours. You should have come in through the back window, and—"

"Sir!"

"Possibly you might have possessed yourself of the certificates *and* the mortgage," said Waldron, paying no heed to the indignant outburst of the other.

"What do you mean, sir? Do you mean to insinuate that I would commit a theft? Have a care, you are treading on dangerous ground!" he admonished, with increasing anger, and a certain assumption of bravado.

"Not necessarily," replied Waldron, with exasperating coolness. "I merely suggested two methods of accomplishing the same object. You have shown your fine discretion by adopting legitimate business methods, which entitle you to the fine protection of the law. Had I come upon you as suddenly while employing the other method, which is only another way of accomplishing the same result, the same law would protect me in administering the punishment you so richly deserve. In other words, the fine distinction of the law saves you from yourself, and makes you an honest man entitled to the respect of the community in which you dwell. Mr. Chadeller, you are deeply indebted to the wise and beneficent laws of your country."

Confronted by a weaker man physically or mentally, Mr. Chadeller would doubtless have resented such unqualified aspersions upon his character much more vigorously than he deemed advisable under existing conditions. There was that about the man who had placed him so completely on the defensive by laying bare motives he had sought to hide even from himself, which tended to exert a restraining influence over his own weaker and ill poised mentality, although evidence was not wanting of an inner tumult of passion.

"You might go further and say that the whole affair is none of yours, and you will have more justification for the assertion than any you have yet made," he declared, very warmly. "I am capable of managing my

own affairs without your assistance, as is Mrs. Winston, I dare say. If she does not choose to accept my offer, well and good, and no harm done. I may then decide that I want the money on the mortgage. In any event I have no further dealings with you in connection with this or any other matter, and we will consider this interview—which I dare say you so kindly arranged, thinking to intimidate me—concluded, young man. I warn you, no more of your nonsense with me—no more of it—do you understand?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Chadeller—you evidently do not. I will enlighten you. We have only arrived at the real object of this interview—I will detain you but a moment longer. You have not settled that little matter of to-day, I believe?"

"Practically so, yes. The details have been arranged, and the matter will be formally closed in the morning."

"The offer is withdrawn, Mr. Chadeller," he was informed with startling abruptness. "I haven't much faith in that particular mortgage, but papers with signatures attached in unscrupulous hands sometimes become more or less annoying, and no harm can come from clipping its wings. I exact that mortgage, Mr. Chadeller, as a bonus on the settlement that I offered you to-day, and I will see you at my office at ten o'clock to-morrow morning and conclude our business relations—finally, I trust."

"What do you mean, sir? This is outrageous—outrageous, sir!" fairly howled the surprised and infuriated Mr. Chadeller. "Is this business according to your fine ideas—agree upon one settlement, and avail yourself of a technicality to demand another? I won't stand it

—you hear me, sir—I won't stand such nonsense. It's not business!"

"You are right. It is not business according to my ideas. The methods, however, are yours—not mine. I am properly ashamed to employ them, and my sole justification is the fact that I am compelled to adopt the same weapons as my adversaries. Mr. Chadeller, I was willing to deal with you as a man, and I showed my sincerity by making the first advances when you were in my power. Now I am dealing with you the only way you are capable of appreciating—I am biting.

"And if I refuse?"

"You will settle on the same basis as Mr. Burrows and his followers, which still leaves a comfortable margin to make the settlement I now offer you rather more desirable, if I mistake not. However, it is for you to decide, and I shall consider your failure to meet me at the appointed time as equivalent to a refusal of my proposition. Now, sir, the interview is concluded."

CHAPTER XXXI

"YOU LOVE *ME?"*

ONE after another the characters in the great drama of life make their entrances and their exits. Some are applauded—some are condemned; each plays the part for which he is cast—it is a law none may transgress.

Mr. Chadeller had no sooner taken his departure than Waldron was favored with another presence vastly more agreeable. Said agreeable presence appeared in the form of a very brisk young woman clad in a most becoming tailor-made gown, topped by an equally fetching creation of the milliner's art, and swinging a very elongated umbrella.

"Well, I'm a bear! I may not look the part, but I am!" was the surprising declaration of this interesting creature as she planted the aforesaid umbrella directly before her and contemplated the man with mingled seriousness and amusement, the former, however, seeming to predominate. "From all I am able to understand," she further declared, "the bulls turned the tables on the bears and drove them into the woods helter-skelter, and —well, really, I don't know—why do they do such things?" she asked, quite helplessly.

"Beastly shabby of the bulls!" he told her, not very sympathetically, it is to be feared.

"I am one of the unfortunates, it seems," she continued, not much enlightened by his reply. "Lost all my money—or most of it. Mr. Lowe sent me a sort of preparatory warning this afternoon, and was to have seen me this evening to give me full particulars, which I did not wait to hear. If he has lost my money—that ends it. I cannot be of any assistance to him. To be sure, I might worry him a good bit, but that would only make the poor man more miserable, and not give me any satisfaction. Jack told me you were here, so I came to tell you my troubles—I must confide in some one. How are you? Troubles first—greetings afterwards," she laughed, forcing herself with evident effort to make light of her misfortune.

"Perhaps, after all, the affair has been grossly exaggerated," he suggested, the conversation again reverting to her troubles.

"Ah, yes, to be sure—you could not well miss it! The occasion distinctly calls for one of two replies—any variation would have stamped you a genius. You might have brutally suggested that the worst was yet to come."

"I was conscious of the extremely commonplace character of my remark. However, as I failed to achieve greatness, I may, perhaps, congratulate myself that I also failed to transgress precedent."

"Of course I must dispose of my house, horses, and all accessories, which I do not so much mind on my own account, but my mother will take quite another view," she told him, more seriously. "I have not as yet informed her—I was not up to it. The disposition of the property involves certain complications, which I

do not in the least understand, except that the proceeds do not all revert to me—in fact, but a small portion. I was supposed to have sufficient to squander aside from the property, and everything was carefully arranged so that I might not, in a mad moment, do away with my worldly possessions in one wild swoop. I was beautifully protected against myself, and left to the mercy of my guardian, as events have proved. Whether I still possess a place to lay my blessed head, or am a subject for my own asylum, is beyond me just at present."

"Allow me to relieve you of your umbrella; and will you remove your hat?" he considerately suggested, at the conclusion of her remarks to which he had listened very intently.

"Don't you like my hat?" she inquired, seemingly surprised at his apparent lack of appreciation. "I think it perfectly lovely! However, to oblige the gentleman, I will sacrifice even my hat," proceeding to comply with his request. "I'm a fright, which is a trifle, if the gentleman is pleased," she declared, with charming resignation, brushing several recreant locks into place.

"The hat as you say, is perfectly lovely—no aspersions intended, I assure you. I desire a few moments' very serious conversation with you, and the hat and umbrella would be sure to get on my nerves."

"Nerves, indeed! You never had one. The lack of them is far more likely to upset you. I am at once suspicious when you confess to a weakness. What deviltry are you up to now, sir?"

"Will you sit here?" he said, arranging a pillow at one end of the small sofa.

"Now I am convinced that something is about to hap-

pen. However, I am prepared for the worst—I believe I have reached a state of recklessness," she laughed, as she accepted the place made for her.

"You see I am taking complete possession of you. I am quite convinced that you are in sad need of a protector," he told her, as he took possession of the other half of the sofa.

"I am sure of it. If I received my just deserts I should be reduced to short strings, given my doll rags, and relegated to first principles generally."

"Is not that rather an extreme view of your immediate requirements?"

"Mine is an extreme case. Heroic treatment only, would be efficacious."

"Will you permit me to prescribe for you?" he inquired, more seriously than he had yet spoken.

"I fear that your prescription would avail me little," she said, regarding him rather doubtfully. "However, you may prescribe, but understand, sir, I unequivocally reserve the privilege of rejection—"

"That is ever the prerogative of your sex—to accept or reject," he gently interposed.

"Because I don't like bitter things, and besides, your motives are not altogether clear to me. They have not at all times been above suspicion, I am compelled to remind you, and I do not intend to bargain for any more bricks of whatsoever kind or character—I shall look before I leap, hereafter. Now, then, if you have any definite proposition to make, please to state it plainly. Well, sir—what have you to offer?"

"Only the love of a man—only his love and protection—"

"What!" she exclaimed, increduously. "Do you mean to say that *you* love *me*?" a tiny finger unconsciously emphasizing the surprise of its owner.

"Ah, yes! That is just what I mean to say," he boldly declared, taking two unresisting hands in his. "Is it really so difficult to understand that a big awkward fellow—" Man! Man! What mean those painful and inarticulate efforts at speech—that desperate clutching at throat, at this, of all unfortunate moments?

"Shall I call for help? Can I do anything to relieve you?" she inquired, with prettily feigned solicitude. "Please, sir, do not distress yourself, because I absolutely refuse to be responsible for the final result if the mere beginning is so painful."

"Jack's collar!" he managed to articulate. "I sacrificed comfort and freedom of speech for an unsullied piece of linen. I was fearful that even though you were inclined to accept the man, the collar might hang him."

"And so you preferred choking to taking any chances?"

"Times over."

"Poor man! Now that you have proved the sacrifice of which you are capable you may remove your collar if you like, or I will get the scissors and amputate it. because, whatever I do, I shall not accept the collar."

"Is it so difficult to believe that he can possess a deep and abiding love—a love as deep and wide and strong as his big awkward self?" he continued, resuming the thread of his declaration, and possession of the little hands. "Do you fear to trust your happiness—your life to his keeping? Do you know him too little—is it too much to ask?"

"Oh, no, no! Not that! I trust you in everything!

I would believe anything you told me. I would go with you anywhere. I believe I would make any sacrifice for you—only—"

"Only what?" he gently asked, smiling at her confusion. "Only what, dear?"

"Only it is all so very sudden, and—there, I have said it after all! I have vowed and declared come what might, I should never be guilty of stereotyping myself into that form. But you have never by word or look given me any idea that you cared for me, which of course, makes it all very sudden."

"I plead guilty to the charge, dear—you are exonerated."

"I could not understand you. You almost never said nice things to me, and when I made pretty speeches to you they just seemed to strike a brick wall and bound back to me. You never seemed to hear, or to care, or to understand, and sometimes I wondered if you were actually stupid in some respects, or just an animated piece of ice. And my! but you were bold at times. Why did you treat me so badly if you really cared for me?"

"I will tell you why, dear," drawing her nearer to him, "but you must not be angry. To be perfectly plain—"

"And brutal!" she interjected. "Go on!"

"And brutal," he acquiesced. "I early conceived the idea that the much maligned Wizard and his mistress possessed several characteristics in common. Of course I had not at that time made the acquaintance of the noble animal—this is merely an impromptu simile in-

spired by after events. I was also warned to beware of you, as you will perhaps remember—"

"Remember! That wretch of a Jack!" she indignantly exclaimed. "I should say I did! And yet, on the whole, I think I shall have to forgive Jack. I fancy I am under obligations to the rascal! But just the same, he needn't have given one something with a string attached, and then attempt to snatch it away—need he? Go on—you were warned against me."

"No, dear, Jack did very wrong—very wrong indeed. I believe I should pension the rascal for his misdemeanor. However, his timely warning agreed with my own ideas perfectly. I was convinced that ordinary methods would never avail with this particular young woman, and hers was a case requiring heroic treatment. I immediately decided, all or nothing, and if nothing, at least the satisfaction of being worsted in a short sharp encounter rather than to suffer the suspense of a long campaign, and possible defeat in the end."

"And so you just pulled my head around like—so—and so—and so!" she quickly responded, emphasizing the summary treatment he had applied to the unruly Wizard. "And then I trotted along very meekly—didn't I? Oh, yes you did—and yes I did! I can see it all now—I saw it even then. And yet—I think I rather liked it, at least I did not seem to mind so very much, did I—Mis-ter Bill?" glancing up at him with pretty consciousness, as she voiced a name to which she had never before given expression. "And when did you first begin to really care whether I behaved well, or—balked?"

"Ah, dear, as I look back, I think you have never been long absent from my thoughts since first we met,

that night out in the mountains. You had hardly gone your way before I realized such a sense of loneliness as I had never known before. Your sweet face was ever before me, and your voice seemed repeating over and over again the words you spoke to me. Even the moon seemed to hold your likeness, and many long weary hours have you been my companion on lonesome rides and midnight watches. And sleep many times brought sweet dreams of your companionship; and sometimes—Ah, yes, sometimes!—I wished life might be the one long sweet dream of happiness that came to me when my own consciousness took wings and another sweeter and dearer came in its stead."

"And you really thought of me so much—and you knew me so little?"

"Out in that lonesome country one is permitted so much time for thought—thinking, thinking, ever thinking. Thoughts are companions, and one chooses as he will."

"And so you chose me for your companion?"

"Yes, dear, I chose you—every fibre of my being chose you. You have been more to me than you can ever know. You have been the sweet inspiration of my better self—a self I never knew until you made me conscious of the wonderful wealth of my possessions."

"And so I did regenerate you, after all," she said, laughing softly. "And so you just thought and thought, those lonely nights out there in the mountains; just thought of the girl you might never see again—a careless frivolous girl who perhaps had never a thought for you?"

"Yes, dear, and those were some of the happiest hours I have ever known. In the silence of the night come

thoughts we never know by day. Strange moods hold us in their grasp, and beautiful enthralling thoughts flood fast upon us, do we but give them leave to come. So alone, so at one do we seem with nature that we are privileged, with scarce volition of our own, to quaff at her wondrous fount of life and love from which the poor chap off in the mountains may drink his fill, even though he must find his sweetheart in the moon, and confine his love making to the communion of spirit—yet all strangely in accord with that vast, wild, weird, wonderful solitude."

"How beautiful are such thoughts! And what happiness you must derive from your knowledge of things of which so many of us have little or no conception. And what in others might be mere effeminacy, in you, who seem so much a part of that wild and rugged country, is the very breath of truth and life."

"And did the careless frivolous girl never give even one stray little thought to the man away out there in the mountains in return for the many he gave her?"

"Ah, dear, how strangely are some things ordered. And what will you say, when I, too, confess that you have been much in my thoughts since that eventful night. Yes, dear, my thoughts have unconsciously turned to you—Oh, so many, many times! And perhaps some of those nights an answering thought has gone back to you, and after all, it was a very real girl with whom you held such sweet communion."

"I am sure of it. One could not give so much without receiving something in return."

"I have imagined all sorts of strange and wonderful things about you. You interested me not a little in the short time we were thrown together. My curiosity was

aroused as well—that insatiable curiosity of mine!" she laughed. "I think I was just the least little bit afraid of you—you seemed such a terribly dangerous man. My! but you fairly bristled with guns—they were strapped all about you. I was mortally afraid one of them might pop off accidentally and set them all going like a bunch of fire-crackers. Where were you going? And what were you going to do? Or were you simply at your regular fighting weight? Is that the proper term?"

"It is as good as another," he laughed.

"That you were not one of the rough fellows of that wild country was plainly apparent. Your rough clothes failed to hide the evidences of your earlier life and training. Sometime when we become better acquainted—perhaps when I have been given legal permission, so that I may be well within my rights and privileges—I shall want to know much more about you. Oh! I shall want to know heaps and heaps of things—I give you fair warning."

"Very well, dear, when you are properly privileged you shall know all."

"And those times when I was so much in your thoughts, did you really expect to see me again," she asked him, graciously ignoring a very mean speech.

"At times I would take myself severely to task and declare that such nonsense had gone far enough; that such thoughts were worse than useless, but all to no lasting purpose. Yet another thought, nourished without volition of my own—even against my better judgment—told me that we should meet again, and had I followed my first impulse when you entered this room on the night of our second meeting, I should have taken you in my

arms and told you that I had found you at last in the joy and gladness that surged into my heart. And times since, when perhaps you have thought me coldest, I have been obliged to exert all my self-control to refrain from telling you what was in my heart, but I feared that I should only amuse you for the moment, and in the end be cast out of your life."

"I cannot recall reciprocating just such a wild desire on the occasion of our second meeting, yet you seemed not in the least a stranger to me, and I could no more help trotting down those stairs and talking to you than I can help loving you now, and I guess if the truth were known, my desire was not greater to refrain from one than the other."

"And when did you begin to think it might be desirable to refrain from one or the other—the other, for instance?"

"When you coolly—and I think rather impudently, sir—informed me that I was all right in my way—such condescension—but gave me to understand, no, you told me just that—you did not even permit yourself the civility of leaving the inference to me—that the particular way was none of yours, I think—well, I think I loved you from that moment. My desire, however, to take your head off was considerably greater at that particular time, and perhaps you think I would not have taken fiendish delight in doing just that, even though I knew my heart would pay the reckoning."

"And all the while I was blissfully unconscious of the fate I had so narrowly escaped."

"You were wise, sir, to keep out of my clutches for a time—you reckoned well. You shall pay dearly for

your bad behavior! Just think of the years and years you will be compelled to do penance, because you are too mean to die, and I won't, just for spite. Moreover, I'll take solemn oath never to give you cause for divorce, but just *make* you endure to the bitter end. Now, sir, do you realize the punishment in store for you?"

"What a terribly vindictive little creature you are, to be sure, when all the while your welfare was my chief concern—simply protecting you against yourself, and providing you with a husband most expeditiously. Had you been permitted to make the pace, I should even now be trailing along somewhere—perhaps in the next county—a creature of circumstances and woman's wiles."

"Oh, yes, to be sure! It is very comforting to know after it is all over that a man had very considerately selected himself for one's husband, and if one was so foolish as to be miserable the while, there was really no necessity because the man knew all about it and what was best for the woman. But just the same, I have missed something. You might have let me know you cared just the littlest bit, and then—"

"You know now, dear, all about it, and we have years and years in which to make amends for the few short days—"

"But don't you see—it's not quite the same. There's the delicious uncertainty of something quite certain. You know, yet you don't know, and you just live on those days and minutes—there just can't be anything to take their place. It's like the first kiss—when it's gone, it's gone. There may be others, and perhaps very much better, mind you, but none quite the same."

"Yes, dear—the first kiss."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LAW THAT RULES THE UNIVERSE

AND so you waited until I had been despoiled of my possessions, and then offered yourself as my protector? Ah dear but that was good of you!"

"Yes—yes!" he acquiesced, somewhat doubtfully. "You see—"

"Yes, dear, I know," she gently interposed. "You are rich in yourself, and that to me, is greater than all else."

"What optimists love makes of us—how generous we become under its magic spell," he said, with fond approval.

"And how we trust our better selves when love is the guiding power! Would that all the world might love—"

"As we do?" he gently supplied.

"Yes, dear, as we do. It would not be in my power to wish the world a greater happiness."

"And now, about the future. How would you like a modest little cottage down here by the sea? Jack and Maude will be getting married one of these days, and then we shall all be here together."

"That will be lovely! I shall be glad to get away from the tumult of the city and enjoy a little rest and quiet. I am content to share your life as you make it. Without you, life would be but a passive existence. You have

spoiled me for anything of which you are not a part—the greater part."

"Excuse me for living!" exclaimed Jack, turning abruptly to quit the room into which he had rushed with his usual impetuosity.

"Come back, Jack!" said Waldron. "You may as well be made aware of the complications for which you are in no small measure responsible."

"Beg pardon, sir!" offering a mock salute. "I forgot to ring my bell, and my light was out. I came in to tell Cathy that Mr. Lowe is here, and wishes to see her on very important business."

"And her troubles still pursue her!" she sighed. "I fancied I had evaded them for a time—I believe I had quite forgotten them. Tell the gentleman that I am engaged—doubly engaged," she laughed, glancing shyly up at the man by her side. "Say that I will see him tomorrow—next week—any time but the present. I have lost all my money, Jack, but misfortune has brought me a fairly commendable substitute. It is a very ill wind that blows no good—even if it be only a man. We are going to live down here, and perhaps have a cottage beside you and Maude. We shall be very modest as becomes sensible people—"

Her confidence was rudely interrupted by an outburst of merriment on the part of the young man who was quick to grasp the true state of affairs. "What do you mean, Jack Winston?" she indignantly demanded. "What do you mean by such—"

"All right, Cathy, I'll tell the gentleman that this is your busy day. Love in a cottage—Oh, me! That's too

good!" he laughed, discreetly taking himself away from the displeasure he had incurred.

"What does he mean?" she demanded of the man of her choice.

"You are certainly entitled to an explanation," he gravely assured her.

"That young man evidently looks upon something as a huge joke. I am sure I don't see anything so remarkably strange, or so excruciatingly funny as to occasion such unseemly mirth, do you?"

"I see no cause for undue hilarity."

"Because if there is, I am missing something, and I object to things being passed over my head."

"Perhaps he was overcome by the prospective happiness of your suggestion," said the same unscrupulous man.

"He impressed me as only a little less than hysterical. I hope he is not contemplating another attack, because everything seems to point to me as the one responsible—whatever it is I am responsible for."

"Pardon me again," said Jack, returning to the room, with difficulty composing his features. "The gentleman insists that his business is far too important to be deferred, and bids me make another and more urgent appeal to your ladyship to grant him but a moment of your precious time. I trust I am happy in my efforts." But his efforts were suddenly directed along entirely different lines as a feminine hand laid hold of a convenient book, and he sought refuge behind the nearest obstacle, which chanced to be the other man. "Please note the tender object in front before hurling anything carelessly in this direction," he admonished, with exasperating coolness.

"Very well, I will see the gentleman—and I will see you later, young man!" he was very positively informed, as she passed out of the room.

Jack congratulated Waldron with characteristic frankness upon what he was pleased to term his good fortune, and insisted that he had hoped for this same result from the first. "There is only one Cathy and one Maude," he declared, with great satisfaction, "and we have cornered them both. All we require now are the cottages—side by side," which he seemed to regard as a huge joke.

"Well, I am only a little more confused than before, as the result of my interview with the gentleman," Cathalee announced, upon her return a few minutes later. "Everybody seems to radiate mysteries, and so far as I am able to discover I am the bright and particular luminary around which they revolve. I am really at a loss to understand whether I am an object of pity, a joke or just what part I am supposed to be playing."

"What light did this particular gentleman throw upon the situation?" Waldron inquired.

"To begin and end with, sir, he said that you are a scoundrel—a particularly bad kind. His expression seemed to me a trifle informal—rather more expressive than polite. Oh, he said it!" she insisted. "He said, furthermore, that you were the cause of all the trouble; that you have practically all my money, considerable of his, and a lot of Mr. Burrows' and Mr. Morrison's. All in all, you have behaved very badly, I am led to infer. He said, too—and if you please bear witness, this to me is the touching part—that I had better look out for you; that no good could come from harboring such a rascal."

"Cheerful intelligence concerning the man to whom

one has but just linked her destiny," he told her, with commendable commiseration.

"However, in justice to you because you were not there, and to myself because I was, I informed the gentleman that he was speaking of my affianced husband. The poor man nearly collapsed; but whether from embarrassment, or sympathy for me I was not able to determine."

"He was in duty bound to warn you—your worldly interests had been committed to his keeping," he felt compelled to remind her.

"I also informed the gentleman that you were even then in the house," she continued, ignoring a very questionable remark, "and suggested that he would do well to express his sentiments to you, personally, as I was sure that you could appreciate their particular application far better than I could possibly manage. He said that he had had one interview with you today, and I fancied he seemed rather fearful that another might be forced upon him as he immediately decided that my business could wait until tomorrow, and hastily took his departure."

"I fear my efforts went for naught, after all," sighed Jack.

"Now do you mind telling me what it is all about?" said Cathalee, curiously regarding first one and then the other of the men. "What sort of a man have I really bargained for? Is he rich man, poor man, beggar man, or—what Mr. Lowe said? Not that it makes any difference to me whatever—a mere matter of curiosity on my part. The man cannot possibly prove an alibi, and I am willing to put up with the limit in either direction. I can stagger under a load of riches, while my talents in

the begging line amount to little short of genius. What do you mean, sir, by such carryings on?" she indignantly demanded, turning suddenly upon Jack, who was no less amused by her piquant comments than by the general situation. "You have more joy than you can properly manage, Jack Winston, and I advise you to dispense a small portion and permit others a slight indulgence—you will surely do yourself harm."

"What do I mean?" he cried, with difficulty controlling his mirth, "I mean—it means—that you have drawn the capital prize in the matrimonial lottery! Love in a cottage! Ha! Ha! Why, Cathy, your prospective husband owns a gold mine that requires a whole railroad to carry off the gold; and I own part of the railroad—don't I, Mister Bill?"

"Exter! Exter!" piped a shrill small voice. "Latest 'dition evenin' pipers!" and a young miss arrayed in her brother's coat, his cap drawn recklessly over one eye, and his collection of papers under her arm romped upon the scene. "Exter! Exter! Full 'count of de terryble corner in bears—tousands of lives lost—no, dollars—tousands of dollars made and lost! Piper, miss?" handing Cathalee a paper, "Piper, sir?" handing Waldron another, "Piper, sonny?"

"Get out of that coat, Kid!" indignantly ordered big brother, starting in hot pursuit of the fleeing "kid," who required no second admonition to place a safe distance between herself and the lordly owner of that new coat which was assuredly not designed as a plaything for little sisters.

"I could manage the scoundrel part, and even Mr. Lowe's qualifying phrase, but the picture is simply tram-

pling one's good nature under foot," said Cathalee, shaking her pretty head in disapproval of the supposed likeness of her prospective lord and master, as she rapidly scanned the large head-lines which told her more of the man to whom she had given herself than she had known before. "Ah, dear!" she said, looking up into eyes watching her with amused interest, "shall I ever know you? I wonder if I ever shall? You will always be to me like some great and wonderful book, one may read over and over, ever finding something new."

"I hope so, dear."

"And shall I ever feel that I have cut all the pages, and read each line—or having read, that I understand?"

"I hope you may never find the story old, and when you have committed it all to heart, may it still be the sweetest story ever told."

"Ah, dear! I know you so little—and yet so well," she softly sighed, looking up at him with eyes of love.

"You certainly took the man for better or for worse—the accessories were merely side issues," he was compelled to admit.

"And to think that I insisted upon your being a poor man despite yourself—and how you permitted me to have my own way," she laughed, just a little reproachfully. "And is it really true that you have all my money?"

"That I cannot say—but very likely."

"What an unscrupulous man you are, to be sure! And did you think by depriving me of my means of sustenance to make me perfectly helpless, and simply compel me to accept the first man who chanced to offer himself? To think had you not happened to be the man! However,

I am glad it is all in the family, because now I can go on with the work that I had planned, and with your assistance my poor efforts will no longer be make-believe."

"Yes, dear—we will work out our regeneration together."

"I want you to do something for me this very minute —Oh, you will find me very terrible! There are no end of things I shall want. Jack and Maude—I want you to do something for Jack."

"I have already arranged for that young man's future, my dear. Who else would you like to provide for? What about yourself?"

"Oh, you will provide for me! You cannot well do less, you know, after taking away my worldly possessions."

"True. I must not fail in my duty now that I have you so completely in my power."

"Even were we entirely dependent upon the work those big strong hands could do, I would trust myself to their keeping, and to the great big heart that beats in there," a little hand indicating the location of that organ, "and consider myself privileged beyond my just deserts. And I fear—yes, dear, I fear—I would make any sacrifice—"

"Ah, little one!" he gently interposed, folding her in his big strong arms, and looking into eyes suffused with tears of love and happiness, "I would not, in justice to you, ask you to make even one little sacrifice of which your woman's heart did not approve. No lasting happiness could come through sacrifices that silenced even so much as one little protesting voice of your true and honest self. Sometime I would be compelled to answer

that same little accusing voice that had only been lulled to quiet for a little while, and in just the proportion that you were made to suffer, would you—all unconsciously, perhaps—hold me responsible, and your love wane. That would be but the beginning of the end, finally leaving us destitute of the love we now think we possess for all time, and of which we fondly imagine no power can deprive us."

"Yes, dear, you are right—you would even protect me from myself. And yet, knowing you are right, I would make the sacrifices just the same. Women do not reason like men, which perhaps is well. We cannot reason against the dictates of our hearts. We love—we trust—we give our all in the simple faith that though all the world be false, one man will be true to his trust. We live in the present, content with what each day holds for us. We cannot understand that our love today may be scorned tomorrow, our very sacrifices our own undoing, which may return to us in bitterness of scorn and reproach. Then comes the day of reckoning with our inner selves. Then do our souls demand expiation. Then do we drink such bitter dregs of misery as man can never know, for even so much as we are willing to sacrifice more than he, is he unconscious and careless of the weight of woe he casts upon her whom he has pledged himself to love, honor and protect—yet knowing, we are not proof against ourselves. What is it? Why is it?"

"It is the violation of the law of love—the law that rules the universe," he said, with simple faith.

"Ah, yes!" she softly sighed, "the law that rules the universe! How we transgress it! How little we understand and appreciate the most precious of our possessions!

The shallowness, the emptiness of the great world, if no fond heart answers to the yearnings of your own! How cold, how callous, if it holds not one dearer than all others! Nothing can take its place—no substitute ever known. Riches and station are but hollow mockeries, intoxicating for the moment, and leaving only the anomaly of a man or woman who thinks to find the consummation of life's purpose in the artificialties of the great world. Ah, dear, it is all well lost if one but gains the love that is true."

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